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New York Nat's Masked Mascot.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



NEW YORK NAT STOOD UP IN THE SEAT AND WILDLY WAVED HIS LANTERN.

New York Nat's Masked Mascot;

OR,

THE BOY POLICE LEAGUE'S
TUNNEL HUNT.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "NEW YORK NAT, THE GAMIN
DETECTIVE," "DICK DOOM"
SERIES, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT PROWLER.

"Olive, you have thrown your fortune away, if you have vowed not to touch one dollar of Miser Max's money."

"Not one dollar, not one cent, Nat! Did he not kill my father, and could I now live on the blood-stained inheritance he has left me?"

"No indeed! I will none of it!"

"And what will you do now, for you are, in the eyes of the law, still the lost heiress, and as such must keep in hiding."

"What will I do? Why, work, as you have done! I will be one of your Boy Police League, Nat, and you will find that, girl that I am, I can render you good service, and you can still be my protector."

"Once a little New York flower-girl, I can again become such—yes, if need be I can dress as a boy and help you, for, having found in you my own dear brother, I will not part from him, and together we can win our way in the world. But, go now, Nat, for I know you have an important duty to attend to. At the appointed time for your Boy Police League to meet, I will be there."

"Will you dare come *there*, Olive?"

"Ha! ha! What have I to fear from the dead? Have no fears for me; I will be at the vault in the graveyard at the appointed time."

"You are a brave girl, Olive, and I am proud of you, for daring as my band of young ferrets are, they will not go alone into that old cemetery. I have to meet them out in the lane and guide them all there together, yet you dare go alone."

"I will be there, Nat, never fear," and the girl turned away.

She was scarcely over sixteen, with a markedly beautiful face, though stamped with strong character, courage and intelligence on every feature.

She stood upon the piazza of a small cottage in the upper part of New York City, and gazed out upon the Hudson, with its many craft plying to and fro.

As she looked she mused:

"Yes, the little waif, educated and left a fortune by the man who killed her father, given as an atonement for his crime, refuses his money and will work her way in life without his gold, as she did when left a motherless child at the mercy of a cruel world."

"Nat, too, did not go to the bad, but is a noble, honest boy, and there is that in us to keep us good, though there is a fortune in my grasp did I accept it as an atonement."

"Ah! storm-clouds are rising and we will have rain before nightfall; but, so much the better for the meeting, to-night, of Nat's Boy Police in the graveyard, for all the fewer people will be abroad to observe them."

Her prediction proved true, for soon the clouds overspread the skies and the rain began to fall.

As night advanced the shower settled into a steady rain; but, nothing daunted by the darkness or the storm, a slender form stole out of the little cottage at nine o'clock, and rapidly went up the street leading to the hilltop.

Turning into a sparsely settled and untraveled street, the form went on until it came to a massive gateway leading into a

walled-in space of several acres thickly overgrown with trees and brush from long neglect, but with the indication of having once been well-cared-for grounds around a grand old-time mansion that was hidden in the midst of the foliage.

Scaling the wall by climbing upon the gate, the form dropped over into the grounds and walked rapidly along the weed-grown driveway, passed around the huge old pile in which no light burned, for weird stories were told of the deserted mansion of Miser Max who had been murdered there one night.

Some distance in the rear of the mansion, which looked indeed gloomy and gruesome in the darkness and rain, the very abiding place of specters, the one who had dared to venture there halted at a wall near which a tree grew.

Climbing the tree was easy, and from thence to get upon the wall, walk along a few paces and drop down upon the other side only the work of a moment.

Dark as was the night it could be seen that the spot into which this night prowler had dared venture was an old cemetery, long deserted, for the city of the living had spread around the village of the dead, and with the weird tales told of the old haunted mansion few there were who dared to invade the drear spot by day, even had they not been warned off by a sign that read:

"No trespassing allowed!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BOY POLICE LEAGUE.

THE form that had glided like a dark specter through the grounds of the old mansion, then amid the graves of the burying-ground without seeming dread of the surroundings and desolation, went quietly on until the path led between hills rising thirty or less feet in height, and into which on either side were rows of massive vaults, crumbling to decay.

Before one of these the form halted, a canvas curtain was drawn aside and the act revealed a crescent-shaped hole in a massive iron door through which streamed a light.

The door was drawn slowly open, and the muffled form entered.

It was a forbidding home for the living, and yet that it was the home of a living being, dwelling among the dead, was evident at a glance.

It was a large family vault, with arched roof, a wall in which were niches for the dead, some of them filled as the tablets on them revealed, and, with the corridor space, quite a good sized room.

This space was carpeted over, the walls at the end hung with curtains, and the place was furnished.

A long bench rested against the wall into which the dead were placed, a table with a lamp upon it stood at one end, and there was a cot there too, while an open niche had been made use of as a wardrobe.

At the further end was a pile of wood, an ingeniously formed fireplace with a stovepipe leading up through the air chimney in the vault, while a few cooking utensils were on the stone flooring and another open niche in the wall for the dead was made use of as a pantry.

The one who entered was enveloped in a long waterproof and cloak, top-boots and a rubber cap which kept off the rain.

A glance was taken around the vault and there came the murmured words:

"Not here yet. Then I will wait outside, for I wish to know just how I will be received."

With this the speaker slipped out of the vault and gliding away in the darkness took shelter from the driving rain behind a large tomb, just as a dozen shadowy forms appeared, marching in single file, silent as phantoms and all muffled from head to foot.

The one in advance halted at the vault,

opened the iron door, allowing the canvas curtain to shield the light from within, and the party glided in and ranged themselves in a row upon the long bench, the leader taking the chair at the table.

As he threw off his water-proof, and the light of the lamp fell full upon him, it revealed the face of a handsome boy, that looked older than the fifteen years he appeared to have lived.

His form was slender, wiry and graceful, and his face one full of character, daring and determination, the face of an old head on young shoulders.

He was well dressed, and might have been taken for a college student.

The others were youths ranging from thirteen to twenty, of all sizes, and with faces as different as their make-ups.

One was dressed in the uniform of a hotel bell-boy, another as a messenger, a third as a young dude, a fourth in some family livery, a fifth as a bootblack; and then there was one with a bundle of evening papers under his arm, and a few who were nondescripts in looks and attire, and might be taken for any of the street gamins who can be seen in Broadway, the Bowery, along the wharves, or congregated in the worst part of the city.

All told, there were thirteen, and a fearless lot they looked, or would have looked, only there was an expression of awe upon the faces of all at their surroundings. Only their leader seemed not in the slightest degree impressed.

"Well, mates, it's a bad night to have you all come away up here to hold a meeting, but then, it is safer, because of the storm; and this is the safest place after all for us," said the leader.

"I says no, cap'n, for no good can come of our hanging around dead folks," answered one.

"Well, Shorty, I know that none of you exactly like this vault as a meeting-place, but then it is my home, and I find the dead the best of neighbors; but still, I have decided that we will meet in future in Miser Max's old mansion."

"It's haunted," said several voices in chorus.

"So much the better if it is, for we will not be disturbed there."

"They say old Maxwell's ghost stays there, and the ghost of his daughter whom he shot by mistake for her lover, yes, and other spirits as well."

"Well, mates, I have lived in that mansion until I came here, and there and in this burying-ground I have yet to see a ghost, so there we meet in the future, for there is no safer place unless it is here, and you know that, although we call ourselves the Boy Police League, and do much in the cause of justice, we are yet hunted by the very ones we serve, and if the police raided us here to-night every one of us would be jailed with the strong prospect that we would be sent to prison."

"Yes, we are Boy Ferrets, yet hunted down as criminals," and the leader spoke with considerable bitterness.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAITOR.

"WELL, New York Nat, it's your fault that we are hunted, I say, for you won't let us come out open and do our work like men."

The speaker was the eldest and largest one of the youths, and his face was one that was by no means prepossessing.

All looked at him with surprise, as he thus addressed their captain, New York Nat, and they moved uneasily, waiting for the latter to speak.

He had shown no surprise or anger at the words of the other, and replied calmly:

"As I understand it, Sykes, detectives and police work secretly and not openly, and it

is only by underhand means and shadowing we can accomplish what we do."

"But, if you went to the chief of police and told him what we did, he would take us into his service, and I say do it."

"Would he?"

"Yes, he would."

"Let me ask you, Sykes, if you are willing for me to go and tell him that I have in the Boy Police League the one who—shall I remind you of that affair on the yacht one night, Sykes?"

The youth sprung to his feet, his face livid, and from his trembling lips came the words:

"What does you know about that yacht, New York Nat?"

"Everything, Sykes; but, sit down and be convinced that there are more than you in our League who have reason to dodge the real police."

"I believe I know the lives of all of you, and whatever wrong-doing, circumstances beyond your control may have led you into, you are not bad at heart, and when I banded you together to give up evil lives and be honest, showing by our deeds that we were worthy of pardon, and accomplishing work that will bring us all money in rewards, I felt sure that I had those behind me that I could depend upon to the death."

"And you can," cried a number of voices.

"I believe that I can, and we will work together."

"Knowing the city and its surroundings as we do, and invading all the places, from hotels, clubs and private families, down to saloons and the lowest dives, it is in our power to track down criminals and even prevent the commission of crime by giving timely warning."

"But not yet do we wish to be known as we are, and hence we must remain in hiding."

"We are with you, Nat," came in a chorus of voices.

"How is it with you, Sykes?" quietly asked the young leader.

"It is just this way;—that I think you means well, but you is too young for captain, and you makes mistakes."

"If the boys prefer you for captain let them say so."

Sykes was again upon his feet and facing the band, while he cried:

"And don't you say so, boys, that you prefers me for captain to Graveyard Nat, here?"

"No!"

Every one present had thus answered—save Sykes, while Shorty added:

"Sykes, you is a fool, and I don't believe you is really one of us."

The youth dropped back in his seat, evidently greatly disappointed, while with no triumph upon his face Nat said:

"You have been answered, Sykes, so now tell me what glaring mistakes I have made?"

"In the first place, yer let a gal join this band."

"Our mascot?"

"Yes, yer calls her so."

"What have you against her?"

"She wears a mask and we wouldn't know her ef we seen her without it."

"That is her affair, and none of the others have objected to her being masked."

"Well, I does; and more—no gal or woman can keep a secret, or do any ferret work, and the first thing we know she'll get us all juggled."

"On the contrary, Sykes, she has done a great deal of valuable detective work, as I have proof of; and, as far as getting us into jail, she will not be the traitor in our midst."

"Does yer mean to say that there will be one?"

"There is one, Sykes."

"Who does yer mean, for if thar be, he oughter be put inter thet hole alive and

sealed up," and Sykes pointed to one of the open niches in the vault.

The boys shuddered at the suggestion, while New York Nat said:

"No, no, Sykes; not as had as that for the worst foe we could have; but he should be prevented from doing us wrong as he has arranged to do."

"Who is he?" was the earnest cry, and they glanced from one to the other and their eyes rested upon their young chief.

"Mates, I am sorry to tell you that one of our band did turn traitor and arrange to sell us out to the police this very night."

"Who is he?" again came the stern question.

"It is Sykes," was the response, and before more could be said Sykes made a bound for the iron door, half opened it and started with a cry of horror, for there before him, leveling a revolver at his head, stood a muffled form, the same that had glided alone into the graveyard half an hour before!

CHAPTER IV.

THE MASKED MASCOT.

"Not so fast, Sykes!"

"Go back into the vault, for you are wanted."

So said the one who suddenly confronted the youth who had attempted to escape.

Had it been elsewhere than in that graveyard, Sykes, with his great strength, speed and fear would have attempted to run down any one who approached him; but the form facing him, in the indistinct light looked like a specter to him, and he shrunk back into the vault with a groan.

"Come in, Queen!" called out New York Nat, and the muffled form strode into the vault, and the young captain ordered two of the band to stand by the door, while he took from of one the niches a pair of handcuffs.

"Hold out your hands, Sykes," he ordered.

The look of a demon settled on the face of Sykes, and in another instant he would have sprung upon the young leader but that muffled form glided forward and a revolver stared him full in the face, while he heard the words:

"Obey your captain!"

With a muttered execration Sykes held out his hands and they were quickly ironed and the prisoner placed between two of the band.

"Take that seat, Queen," requested Nat, referring to his chair, and at once the heavy waterproof was thrown off, the cap cast aside and there appeared a young girl to judge by her form, for her face was completely masked—the mask being made to resemble the human countenance.

The band instinctively arose and saluted her, and with an acknowledgment of it she sunk into the chair, while, standing by her side New York Nat said:

"Mates, I have accuse! Sykes here of being a traitor, and I called this special meeting to-night that I might entrap him, though there is also other business which I wish to bring before you also, and of an important nature; but first, we must decide upon the fate one of who has proven a traitor in our midst."

"It is false! I am no traitor," cried Sykes savagely.

"I accuse Sykes of having two days ago gone up to an old gentleman whom he had noticed about here and asked him if he was not a detective?"

"He received a reply in the affirmative, and then he asked him *what it was worth* to unearth a band of young criminals whom the police had in vain tried to lay hands on?"

A groan ran around the group at this and Sykes turned a shade paler, but said:

"I was trying to draw him out, so I could find out what he were slippin' round fer."

"Will you describe the man?"

"He was a small gent, with gray hair, spectacles and a stoop in the shoulders, but

I were sure he was disguised and so wanted to nail him."

"Yes, and to do so you agreed to sell out the band of Boy Police for five hundred dollars, and arrange to do so the next regular night of our meeting, for you did not then know of this special one."

"I did nothin' of ther kind."

"You thought, you say, that the old gentleman was a detective in disguise, and I wish to show you that you were right," and, stepping to the niche used as a wardrobe, New York Nat drew out a suit of clothes, a gray wig, cane and spectacles, and said:

"This is a part of the old gent, Sykes, and I am the other part."

A loud murmur ran through the group at this, while Sykes, feeling that he had betrayed himself cried eagerly:

"I didn't mean nothin', fer I was only playin' it on one I thought were watchin' us."

"That is a shade too thin, Sykes," answered New York Nat, and turning to the band he continued:

"Mates, it was our Girl Mascot here, whom we made our Queen, who told me that Sykes was playing double, for, though she had no proof other than having read him, she was sure of it, and so, to find out, I disguised myself and hung about, for the Queen said Sykes often came up this way alone, and so he was trapped."

"Kill him!" savagely urged one of the elder youths.

"Oh, no! our duty is to keep the law, not break it, and yet, we must not let this traitor go free."

"No!" came simultaneously from the indignant band.

"Now if Sykes had his just deserts, according to law, he would be in prison, *perhaps his fate would have been worse*," and New York Nat cast a most significant glance at the prisoner which caused his face to turn to a livid hue.

"It will not therefore be out of the way for us to imprison him."

"If we do that we'll be sure to give our snap away," averred one who was known as Chub.

"You do not understand me, Chub, for I am not such a fool as to put him in a regular prison."

"You heard his words to night against me, and also against our Mascot. He was feeling his way then to see how he could handle you to get you all into his trap."

"Now the prison I speak of is the haunted house of old Miser Max, and he will be as secure there as if he was in the Tombs. I will see that he has his meals and is cared for, while in future we can hold our meetings there instead of here."

"I doesn't know which is wuss, this graveyard or ther old Haunted House," said Flip in a tone that made all laugh, except Sykes, for there was no laugh in him.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROLL-CALL OF THE BOY POLICE.

"Now, mates, as soon as we have discussed a little business, I will lead the way to the dead miner's old house, and you will see for yourselves that it is not such a spooky place as you believe it to be, and we can make it our regular retreat, for it is not watched by the police now, and fronting on the river as it does, we can get near it in a boat, while there are three streets you can enter the grounds from and also from this graveyard."

"I have reason to believe that it holds mysteries—"

"Ghosts?"

"No, Fatty; mysteries which Miser Max did not suspect, for he was much away from his home, and when there, only occupied one wing of it, and those mysteries I hope to clear up."

"So far in our secret police work, we have done well, for my books here show that we have run down a score of reward cases, which leave us in the hands of the chief of police some twenty thousand dollars, and though openly I dare not visit him, I have secretly given him the information we have obtained, and let him understand that claimants for those rewards will one day put in an appearance.

"Now, I wish you all to continue the good work as you have been doing, in hotels, saloons, dives and along the wharves, and we will win in the end and make a name for the Boy Police's Secret League."

"You bet we will!" cried one of the lads known as Doc, and the others were about to cheer, when, suddenly, recollecting where they were, they became as silent as clams, their looks causing the Masked Mascot to break forth in a merry peal of laughter.

"Now, lads," continued New York Nat, "my strongest ally is our Mascot Queen here, for she does the best of work for us, and she has our good at heart.

"Who she is must yet remain a mystery, but I feel that you will trust her as you do me."

"You bet!" was cried in chorus.

"Now the Queen will hand over the week's allowances, and if any of you need more, say so."

The Queen's hands were gloved, but she took from a sachel a bag full of small envelopes and called out the roll as follows, each name being written on them.

"Sykes—no, you will not need yours this week," and she dropped the envelope back in the bag.

"Shorty?"

"Here for ther dust, miss," and Shorty bowed low as he received his envelope.

"Slim!"

"On deck, missus!" and Slim made an awkward bow of thanks.

"Chub!"

"Right here, Mascot!"

"Keno!"

"Here, Queen, anythin'!"

"Blow!"

"Always ready, miss, and I'll need an extra X for special work I am on."

It was taken from the bag and handed to him with his envelope, the Girl Queen marking it opposite to his name in a book she had.

"Teaser!"

"Here," and Teaser grasped his envelope, doffed his hat and fell back to his seat.

"Doc!"

"I accept your prescription, miss," answered Doc, who was called the surgeon of the band, he having studied medicine, it was said, and skipped out for having killed a subject he was operating on in the dissecting-room, and who was not yet dead when he fell into the students' hands.

Fearing trouble, "Doc" gave up medicine and went into hiding as a gamin.

"Flip!"

"Just here," and the youth got what he called his "week's boodle."

"Fatty!"

But Fatty was half asleep, and had to be called twice before he went forward for his envelope.

He was short and fat, so was well named, but he had a bright, pleasant face.

"Parson!"

This youth always dressed in black, was slender, tall, wore glasses and was called the "Chaplain" of the band.

He stepped up in a solemn way, took his envelope with a request for an "extra V" which was given him, and fell back as the Mascot called out:

"Freckles!"

A youth of thirteen, ragged, red-headed, freckled and whose face indicated a perfect imp of mischief threw a flip-flop and landed

before the Mascot, holding out a very dirty hand.

"If you are not afraid it will give you cold, Freckles, wash those hands before the next meeting day."

"I'll do it if I drown," was Freckles's assurance and he winked at the gang and returned to his seat with another flip-flop.

Then New York Nat said:

"Now we will go to the old Rookery, lads."

"May the place not be sold, captain, at any day, and this be the safest place to keep Sykes?" asked Doc.

"No, the place will not be sold, for there is a lost heir to be found first, and I would not have Sykes remain in a vault which he appears to have such fear of.

"The old mansion is the place, as you will all see and I shall take up my quarters there too, for there is a rumor that the bodies in this graveyard are to be removed.

"Come, for here are dark lanterns," and New York Nat led the way out of the vault when all were ready to go.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

WHEN the Boy Police left the vault several of them carried large bundles, one the cot, another the table, a third the chair and so on until the place was stripped of its furniture.

New York Nat led the way, the Mascot following close at his heels, and the others coming close behind her, for they did not like their ghostly surroundings a little bit.

The prisoner was in the center of the pile, and he was tied so that he could not bound away, for the Secret Police intended taking no chances.

Nat, the Mascot and several others had dark lanterns, and the young lady conducted the party through a hole in the wall which was hidden on both sides by cedar trees.

The rain was still falling but the band did not mind that, and glanced curiously and with awe at the old mansion as New York Nat halted at the basement door.

He had a key that unlocked it, and led the way inside where all was damp, black as night and, to the minds of the youths, peopled with ghosts.

But, having closed and locked the door New York Nat opened his lantern, the others who had them doing the same, and they found that they were in a large basement corridor.

Ascending steps leading to the floor above, the young ferrets kept close upon the heels of their leader, as though they expected to run upon a specter each instant.

But both New York Nat and the Girl Mascot seemed perfectly at home in the old structure and continued on their way up the broad flight of stairs in the large hallway on the main floor.

The place had been left furnished, when deserted years before, and yet the furniture was but a wreck of what once it had been.

To the third floor led the young captain of the Boy Police, and there turned into a room in the center of the building.

It had a window opening out upon one of the wings of the mansion, and from which a light could not have been seen from outside.

But the curtains were quickly drawn close and no light shone through them.

The room had once been well furnished, but time had set decay upon all.

"Sykes, here is your prison. You are to have two jailers, myself and one other whom you will see, later.

"I will bring you bedding, for there is plenty of it in the house, and I will arrange that you do not starve.

"I am sorry, but I will have to chain you to that bolt in the floor, for it is my opinion that this is not the first time this room has been used as a prison," and New York Nat pointed to a large iron ring-bolt in

the heavy flooring, while he took from Slim, who had brought them from the vault, a long heavily linked chain and a padlock.

The chain was locked to the ring bolt with the padlock, and the other end was caught in through a link to the manacles upon the wrists of the prisoner.

New York Nat and the Mascot had disappeared together with one of the lanterns, but in a short while they returned, the Boy Captain bearing in his arms a bundle of bedding which was thrown upon the bed.

"I'll fetch you books to-morrow, so you can kill time, but here you must remain a prisoner, Sykes, until we decide what to do with you, for you shall not go free to betray us.

"Queen, let the guard come in."

At the call of the young captain, Queen, who had remained out in the corridor, entered the room, grasping by the collar a huge and most savage looking dog.

He was of enormous size, heavily built and had a wicked face, while he was a cross between a Russian bloodhound and a mastiff.

At the unexpected sight of him the Boy Police, with one accord, gave him room, moving quickly to one corner where they stood huddled together.

"A ghost of Old Nick it is," whispered Chub.

"Get on to the teeth of it," said another.

"Look at them eyes, will you?"

"It's a tiger."

"My! but he's fierce!"

And so on went the criticisms until Doc asked:

"Where did you get his nibs, Captain Nat?"

"He was a present to me from a sea captain, and he is as savage as sin.

"He will not disturb you, Sykes, unless you try to get away, and then he'll hold you.

"Lie down there, Puppy—"

"Puppy? A puppy with his father's teeth," growled Keno.

The dog obeyed Nat and stretched himself out near the door.

"Now, Sykes, we'll leave you, and as it is your first night here, I'll let you have the lantern burning.

"Come lads," and the young captain led the way out of the room, closing the door behind him and leaving the dog sentinel on duty over the prisoner.

Leading the way to another door he opened it, and the band followed him in.

It was a large room and had once been used as a billiard room, for the table and chairs were still there.

The shutters were closed, however, so no light shone through them to catch a curious eye on the outside, and the young leader said:

"This is to be our council chamber, lads, and my room is here," and he opened another door, revealing a small room.

"Put my traps in here, and I'll fix them all right when I return.

"Now I will show you the way out, and how to find me when you want me; but remember our next meeting night will be Sunday."

New York Nat led the way down-stairs once more and out of the old rookery, showing the band just how to enter the building when they came there.

One by one they glided away in the rain and darkness, leaving only the Mascot with New York Nat.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GIRL FERRET.

"Now, Nat, I've got something to tell you," said the Girl Queen of the Boy Police League, when each one of the band had stolen quietly away and the two were left alone.

"Yes, Queen, out with it, for I am going to call you Queen now, altogether, so I will

not make a slip of the tongue and speak your real name some time. But, come back into the house."

He led the way back into the rookery, and opening his dark lantern, the two sat down in the room which had been Miser Max's. Queen could not help but shudder as she glanced about her and said:

"It is just as he left it, and even the blood-stain, where he lay the night he was murdered, looks the same as then," and she pointed to a dark spot upon the floor which had been a pool of human blood.

"Now, Queen, what is it you have to tell me?" said New York Nat, wishing to turn her thoughts from the tragedy which she had witnessed long weeks before and recalled so visibly.

"You know Mr. Labuzan, the handsome and rich young club man we saw in the Park one day?"

"Yes, and he's a fast one."

"He met me yesterday, when I was selling flowers on Fifth avenue, and as he always buys from me, he stopped me and said:

"I wish you to take a bunch of violets to this name and address, and along with them this note, and I will pay you ten times what the flowers are worth, when you bring me the answer—come by the club there, and I will see you and come out and buy another bouquet."

"His manner was nervous, Nat, and I saw that something was wrong, so I took the flowers and the note.

"The address was on the top floor of a flat up-town—here is the address—and not another one of the flats was rented, I noticed.

"I found there a most beautiful woman, the Mexican dancer whom the men rave about so.

"She took the letter and seeming to forget my presence, when she opened it, dashed the flowers upon the floor and ground them into the carpet with her little foot.

"She read the letter aloud, in Spanish, which you know I understand perfectly, and it was in effect asking for her to give him a month's time in which to decide before she did what she had threatened to do."

"And what was that, Queen?"

"As I understood it, Nat, it was for a crime he had been guilty of and was about to commit, for I heard her mutter to herself:

"No, he blasted my life, robbed me, deserted me and he shall not make another suffer as I have done, ay, worse, for she could not be to him what I am."

"Can you understand what the words meant, Nat?"

"I know that Labuzan is engaged to marry a very rich and beautiful girl, Queen, and I take it that this Mexican woman, from her words, is already his wife, and threatens to come out with the truth."

"You have hit it I see now, for the note I took back was written on a card and I ran my finger under the envelope before it was dry, so opened and read it."

"What did it say?"

"That she gave him two weeks only to break off his engagement and acknowledge her, and then, if he still refused, the truth should be made known."

"And you took the letter to Mr. Labuzan?"

"Yes."

"Did you see him read it?"

"Yes, and heard his remark."

"What was it, Queen?"

"He muttered an oath and said in a low tone:

"She shall never tell my secret, for it would ruin me."

"That was a threat."

"Yes, for soon after he said to me:

"Here, Olive, the Flower Girl, do you not live in the slums?"

"I answered yes, and he asked me if I was not an Italian and again I answered in the affirmative.

"Then he told me that he wished an Italian to do some work for him, *one who would not be particular as to the kind of work*, and asked me if I could send him such a person?"

"Ah! your story grows more interesting, Queen; but go on with it."

"I told him I could send my brother, only he must come at night, as he was in hiding, as he was accused of killing a man."

"And his answer?"

"The very one I want."

"Send him to me three nights from this, here is my address, and tell him to come at eleven o'clock."

"I promised, and he paid me for my errand, bought all my flowers and had me take them into the club and pin a button-hole bouquet on each gentleman there, telling them it was his treat."

"This means that he wants to get rid of the Mexican woman?"

"It certainly does, and so I decided to go as my brother to see him."

"No, no, Queen, that is too dangerous work for you, so I will go and then we will see what the result will be; but you deserve the greatest credit for this detective work, and are really going to be a splendid Girl Ferret, see if you are not."

"Now, I will escort you home."

"I am not afraid to go alone," Nat, and you are tired.

"But you shall not go alone," and New York Nat escorted the girl to the little cottage on the river and returning to the old mansion went to his room and was soon sound asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOG SENTINEL.

It was still raining when New York Nat awoke the next morning, but hastily dressing himself he at once left the house, scaled the wall about the grounds and made his way to a grocery store where he made sundry purchases, and then to a restaurant.

Here he ate a good breakfast and had another put up in a caterer's can, with spirit lamp underneath to keep it hot.

Then with the can and his groceries he set off again for the old mansion, instinctively glanced about to see that he was not watched, and then entered the grounds at a place where the wall had crumbled and been boarded up; but one of the boards at his touch swung inward on leather hinges.

Entering the mansion by the secret passage through the cellar, he went up to the prison-room where Sykes, pale and haggard, was lying on the bed watching in the dim light the huge dog before the door.

The dog greeted the youth in a friendly way, while Nat said:

"I have your breakfast, too, Guard," and turning to the prisoner, he continued:

"Here, Sykes, I have brought you a nice, hot breakfast—beefsteak, eggs, hot coffee, rolls and butter—and whenever I can, I will take aa good care of you; but when I cannot, there will be bread, chipped beef and cheese for you to chew on, so you won't starve if I have to neglect you for a day."

"Say, Nat, do you believe I meant to betray the gang?"

"I don't believe it, I know it."

"Well, I'll make a clean breast of it, Nat, and confess the whole biz."

"I were scared we'd be caught, and I wanted money, so I was going to squeal; but I'm sorry now, for you'd oughter kilt me, and in future I'll be your best pal, you bet I will."

"You might and you might not, and I'm taking no chances, Sykes, so it's no use to play the baby act hoping I'll set you free, for I won't."

"You are jailed, and here you stay until

we decide what to do with you, and I'll give you a pointer—"

"Besides the big dog," said Sykes, with a sickly attempt to be funny.

"That's good, Sykes, very good, but it was not that kind of a pointer I was going to give you, for Guard there is enough; but I was going to say that if you attempt to leave this room, should you free yourself, Guard is outside loose in the house and yard, and he'd simply make sausage-meat of you, big as you are."

"Now let me unlock your manacles, so you can eat your breakfast in comfort."

This Nat did, with no fear of Sykes making a break, as Guard had his eye on him.

Going to the window, Nat showed his prisoner that there were heavy iron bars across it, so that he could not get out, and the massive iron shutters he drew to, for there was a skylight in the roof, also barred across, the sashes in it raising and lowering by cords hanging down into the room.

"You will get all the air and light you want from the skylight, Sykes, and while you are eating your breakfast I will bring you up some books, for there is a good library in the house."

Ten minutes after Nat returned with an armful of books and old magazines, and placed them upon the table.

He then took out of his bundle of groceries some candles and matches, some food, and a pitcher which he filled with water.

Then he ordered Sykes to hold out his hands to be manacled once more.

Sykes refused with an oath.

"Guard, did you hear him swear?" asked Nat quietly.

Guard showed his dislike to profanity at once by showing his teeth and crouching as though for a spring upon the prisoner.

"For God's sake call that brute off, for I'll put 'em on," cried Sykes, and he thrust his hands into the steel bracelets.

"You won't stand kind treatment I see, Sykes."

"Now I'll leave you, but will bring you your dinner to-night," and he left the room, followed by Guard, whom he then gave his breakfast.

"Go fetch my hat, Guard," said Nat, and the dog flew back up-stairs, burst into the room, which Nat had left ajar, and scared Sykes half out of his wits, for he uttered a yell of terror.

But the dog did not even notice him, picked up the hat and pulled the door to after him as it was before.

"Good dog."

"Now you have the run of the house, from cellar to attic," and Nat went to his own quarters and fitted them up with what comfort he could.

Then he left the mansion, scaled the wall into the graveyard, and revisiting his old quarters in the vault, cleaned it out, leaving it as though it had never been occupied.

Putting the rusty lock back in the staple of the iron door, he left the cemetery and made his way down-town upon a Secret Service mission, for Nat, the captain of the Boy Police League, was the busiest boy in New York City, for he had laid out for himself a task which many men would have shrunk from.

CHAPTER IX.

A FAST MAN AT HOME.

A MAN of thirty-five sat in his elegantly furnished rooms, a modern flat in a fashionable quarter in Thirty-fifth street.

About him was every evidence of wealth and a refined and luxurious taste, with rare paintings, sketches, and statuary.

He had, contrary to his usual habit, retired at ten o'clock P. M. and caught his valet entertaining some friends in his rooms, and robed out in his smoking-cap, dressing-gown and slippers.

The occupant of this luxurious flat home was wont to take his meals at the club, but then he had his conveniences there for a supper, such as coffee, sardines, crackers and wines of all kinds.

It was a supper from this store-room that the valet's company was enjoying when the master let himself in with his pass-key, a thing he was never known to do, either from being too much under the influence to find the key-hole, laziness, or a desire to rouse his man of all work.

Peter, the valet, had stood like a marble statue at sight of his boss.

He could not speak, he could not move.

There was the table loaded with the remnants of a supper and heavy with empty bottles.

And there were the guests, five in number, for Peter had not forgotten to make things even by inviting one fair lady for his own company.

Peter had on, as I have said, his master's embroidered smoking-cap, dressing-gown and slippers, in fact looked the fashionable young man in high life himself.

He had done the honors well, invited his guests, and put on the card:

"From eight to eleven P. M."

The guests were keeping in mind that eleven was the hour for their departure, and congratulating themselves that they had yet an hour of unalloyed enjoyment, when the door opened and in walked the boss, his presence not known as he stood regarding them.

Peter had timed his arrival for any time after one, which would enable him to put away the bottles, clear up things that were tell-tales of the supper and get his face smoothed into innocence to meet him.

But when the master appeared Peter was paralyzed.

The first knowledge that he had of his presence were the words:

"Peter, when your friends retire, you can accompany them if you wish, for I will have some visitors at eleven to see on business matters."

The friends stood aghast, and Peter looked as though he had been struck with a club.

The master, however, was smiling, and at once went into his front rooms, and the "guests" were only anxious to depart.

While they were getting ready to do so, Peter nerved himself to enter his master's bedroom, threw off his gown, slippers and smoking-cap, and resuming his own outward garb, to carry them meekly in with the remark:

"Will you make a change, sir?"

"To my room dress, yes, Peter, but not in you, for you are no worse than the others, and I know just what you will do."

"Go home with your friends now, but return by one o'clock."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir; I was wrong, sir; I am sorry—"

"You need make no excuses, Peter, tell no lies, for it is all right, only keep an account of what you drink and what I dispose of—good-night, Peter."

Peter left the presence of his boss with a feeling of shame, but when he rejoined his guests, who were most anxious to get out, he hid his mortification and put on airs to an extent that made them believe that it was all right, and he escorted his friends to their homes.

When the door closed behind them the fast man who was impatiently awaiting their departure sprung to his feet and began to pace to and fro, a strange expression gathering upon his face.

"He knows too much, so I dare not quarrel with the fellow."

"I suppose that he has robbed me of hundreds of dollars in this way, yet what can I do?"

"If I discharge him he might at once in revenge go and see Miss Ethel Arden and

report enough of my fast life to destroy me in her eyes."

"Once she is mine I will bounce him very quickly, for then he can do his worst."

"The girl's fortune is all in her own name, when she reaches twenty-one, and she is within half a year of that age, and by the time she reaches it she must be my wife, for Nananita that jealous Mexican shall never destroy my prospects, my life, and bring ruin upon me."

"No, no, she gave me two weeks in which to consider, and in that time I can do much."

"If that flower girl did as she promised, her brother will soon be here and if he has already taken life he will not hesitate to do so again, especially when paid well for it, for I am desperate and will free myself from her, or another six months will ruin me financially, and then Scott Labuzan will no longer have a friend—oh! there is the bell now," and the arch plotter arose and touched the button that opened the outer door down-stairs.

CHAPTER X.

THE PLOTTERS.

Two minutes after the ringing of the bell of the outer door, there came a footstep in the upper hall and Scott Labuzan threw open his door just as the one outside appeared at it.

"Ah, you are looking for Mr. Labuzan, I suppose?"

"I looka for dis gentleman," was the answer of the one addressed and he handed over a card.

"That is right, and I am the one you seek."

"Come in," and Scott Labuzan threw the card upon the floor and led the way into his parlor, after locking the door so that Peter's pass-key could not open it.

"Sit down," he said abruptly, and the visitor obeyed, but looked awkward amid his luxurious surroundings.

He was a youth of eighteen, apparently, with long, black hair, swarthy face, and was neatly yet cheaply dressed.

"You are an Italian?" and Scott Labuzan eyed him curiously.

"Yes, me Italiano."

"What is your name?"

"Natto Nortoni."

"What do you do for a living?"

The youth moved nervously upon his seat, looked up quickly then down again and remained silent.

"Ah, you have no regular occupation then?"

He shook his head in reply.

"Are you the brother of the flower girl who sent you here?"

"Shea my seester."

"She is a very beautiful girl, a child who should not be allowed to run about the streets night and day to make a living."

"She gooda girl, sella heapa da flowa; she alla righta."

"Well, I have given her a good deal of money for flowers, and—"

"Shea say you vera gooda man: lika you vera mucha."

"I feel flattered by her regard; but I am willing to pay you a good deal of money too, Natto."

"Alla righta."

"What are you willing to do for a big sum in money, say five hundred dollars?"

"Five hundra dolla!" exclaimed the youth in pleased amazement.

"Yes, and more if you do your work well."

"Me eara da mon."

"But you do not know what I wish you to do?"

"Alla same, Natto doa."

"You have killed a man, I believe?"

The youth started, looked very anxious and then asked in a whisper:

"How you knowa dat?"

"Oh! I know a good deal; but what I want you to do is to use your knife."

The youth thrust his hand into his bosom and drew out a long-bladed, slender, ugly-looking knife."

"It gooda blade."

"It looks like a bad one; but will you do the work I want for five hundred dollars?"

The youth nodded.

"You must make no mistake."

"No, killa alla right."

"And you must cover up your tracks so no one will suspect you."

"Natto understand."

"And if you should be caught it will do no good to tell who you serve, but let it go as though you meant robbery only."

"Mona there?"

"Yes, and jewels."

"Alla righta, me killa and getta da jewel and da mon."

"You are a hard nut, Natto, but you just suit my purpose, for I do not believe you would betray me if captured."

"No do gooda: but Natto no getta caught."

"I believe you, and yet should you do so I will save your neck if I can."

"Gooda man."

"When can you do this work?"

"Three, four, fiva night—keepa watcha first."

"I see."

"Suppose it is a woman?"

"Alla da same."

"She comes home about midnight every night but Sunday, perhaps a little before, and lives in a flat house on the top floor."

"There is no other flat occupied of the four on that side of the house, and she has only her maid with her, for her house-servant comes by the day."

"Sunday night her maid is allowed out, and that will be the best time to go to her flat and find her alone."

"Natto go Sunda night, or stay in halla any night and waita for her to come."

"Looka good and finda da betta way."

"Do so, for I will leave it to you."

"Writa da name and numbro for Natto now."

This the plotter did, and handing it to him with the remark:

"Destroy this card when you know the place well."

Natto nodded and Scott Labuzan said:

"When you have done the work do not come here until the next night and then I will pay you the money; but will you need any now?"

"Needa da mon for expensa, for run away if da be mistake."

"Well here are twenty dollars for any expenses, and a hundred on account."

"When you have done your work well come to me and I'll make it five hundred more."

"Gooda man; but give Natto pape."

"Oh, an I. O. U."

"Dat righta."

Scott Labuzan wrote on a slip of paper:

"Due Natto Nortoni Five Hundred Dollars upon delivery of cargo of fruit to me at my down-town address."

"SCOTT LABUZAN."

"Gooda man," and the young plotter to take a woman's life soon after took his departure, leaving the arch plotter alone with his thoughts of anticipated success of his fiendish scheme against a woman.

CHAPTER XI.

NANANITA, THE MEXICAN.

NANANITA, the Mexican dancer, was the talk of the town for her beauty and her talent as a dancer.

She received bouquets by the dozen each night, cards of invitation, requests to be al-

lowed to call, and other attentions, but to all turned a deaf ear.

She lived in seclusion, with only her maid, in a cozy flat, and went to and from her home to the theater in a *coupe* she hired by the month.

She never dined or supped in company and was a model.

But one morning Nananita broke through with her rule and received a visitor, for a card had been handed to her maid on which was written

"ANTONIO GOMEZ,
Vera Cruz, Mexico."

She started, for the name was her own, that of Gomez, and she was from Vera Cruz, Mexico.

"Who is it, Chico?" she asked her Mexican maid.

"A very young man, signora."

"Show him in, for I will see him," and Nananita looked very beautiful in her canary colored silk robe.

In came a youth with dark face, well dressed and bowing low he said in fair Spanish:

"The Senorita Nananita is kind to see me, for my visit is of importance."

"You are not a Mexican?" she answered, gazing upon the youth's handsome face, and regarding him with interest.

"No, senorita, I am not a Mexican."

"Then why put your name as such upon this card?"

"I was told the senorita would see no one, and knowing that your name was Gomez, I wrote it upon the card, with the name of your native city as well."

"Why did you do this?" and Nananita looked annoyed.

"I will tell you, for I am not here to seek aid or favors of you, senorita, but to serve you."

"In what way?"

"You know a gentleman here by the name of Scott Labuzan?"

The Mexican woman uttered a cry, and it was one of commingled surprise and anger.

"What of the senor?"

"I am going to tell you the story and let you act for yourself."

"Well, well?"

"The senorita received a note from Labuzan asking for a delay of time for him to act?"

"Ha! how do you know this?"

"It was brought by a flower girl."

"Who and what are you?"

"The senorita will keep my secret?"

"Yes."

"I have your pledge?"

"Yes. Now who are you?"

"A detective."

"Ah!"

"You gave Labuzan two weeks in which to make certain amends, or suffer the consequences."

"I did; but, how do you know this?"

"I know it from the one that brought that note, for you spoke aloud and in Spanish, which she understands better than I."

"Well?"

"She returned your answer and Labuzan's remark not intended for her to hear, or believing she could make aught out of it, caused her to fear for your life at his hands."

The Mexican woman sprung to her feet with a cry, and her face white with rage.

But in an instant she controlled herself and said:

"Yes, he is capable of any deed."

"Now tell me what you know of this man?"

"Of his past next to nothing, but I suspect much."

"What do you suspect?"

"That you are his wife!"

"Boy, who are you?" and the woman spoke almost fiercely.

"A boy detective, as I told you."

"Now tell me what you know of Labuzan now?"

"I know that he has plotted to take your life."

"Ha! you tell me this?"

"Yes, for I know it."

"I will at once have him arrested and—"

"No, hear what I have to tell you, and let me manage the whole thing."

"You are but a boy."

"I am old enough to be hired to take your life."

Again there was a startled cry, and the Mexican woman seemed to feel that she was in the power of an assassin, young as he was.

"Do not be alarmed, for I am not here to harm you, but to save you."

"Ah! what have you to tell me?"

"Mr. Labuzan expects to marry a very rich heiress here, and a lovely young lady from all that is said of her."

"He can never marry her while I live."

"You are his wife?"

"Yes."

"I was right then."

"I have told you, so now to your story."

"It was to get rid of you and your threat to expose him that he plotted your death, feeling that with you dead his secret was safe."

"Yes, for I left my native land to follow him."

"He won my heart in Mexico, when he was there seven years ago and I but a child then, and we were secretly married."

"Then he deserted me, yet here I am."

"And when you let him know that you were here then he plotted to have you killed, for I am the one he hired to do the red work, little dreaming who I was, for I went to him in disguise."

"I got some of my pay, and was to get the rest when the work was done, for I was to kill you here in your rooms on Sunday night."

"Ah!"

"Now I have told you the plot, and learned from you the true story, just what he is to you, and so I beg you to rest in quiet now, and let me play my game out to the end, and then you will be able to appear against him, and the lady to whom he is engaged will be saved."

The woman looked at the youth in a bewildered sort of way.

Certainly he acted and talked beyond his years, and had gotten at the bottom facts of her life in a very clever way.

After a moment he went on to say:

"You must be willing to state that your assassin was caught here by a detective; that he was an Italian boy who had come to kill you, and the report must go out that the intended assassin was captured and taken to prison."

"To the chief of the Secret Service who will come to visit you Sunday evening, say that you were warned by the assassin."

"Will you do this for me, senorita?"

"I will," was the firm reply.

CHAPTER XII.

AN HEIRESS AT HOME.

"Is Miss Arden at home?"

It was the afternoon of the day upon which Nananita the Mexican dancer had received a visitor, and the person who asked the question stood upon the stone steps of the elegant house where Miss Ethel Arden dwelt with her uncle and aunt.

"Miss Arden is in, but is going out for a ride on horseback, so can hardly see you, miss."

"Kindly tell her that it is a matter of importance, and that I will detain her a few minutes only."

The servant ushered the young girl into the parlor, and carried her card and the message.

A moment after Miss Arden, a very beautiful young lady, came into the parlor clad in her riding habit and whip in hand.

She held the card on which was written:

"MISS NETTIE CHANDLER."

A glance showed Miss Arden that she had never before met her visitor, and she beheld a young and very pretty girl, dressed in the height of fashion.

She greeted her pleasantly and said:

"You told the servant that it was important that you should see me, and I am expecting my escort in a few minutes to call for me; but sit down, for I am free until then, and I have some little time."

"May I ask if it is Mr. Labuzan that you are going for a ride with, Miss Arden?"

The young lady arched her brows yet answered:

"It is."

"It is of Mr. Labuzan that I have come to see you."

"Indeed!"

"What is the cause of your visit, may I ask?" and Miss Arden spoke coldly.

"Miss Arden, it is bold of me to visit you, a perfect stranger to you, and expect you to listen to me, yet I earnestly beg that you will hear what I have to say, for if I utter one false word I am willing to accept the consequences."

There was something so honest, so earnest in the words, and the sweet face of the girl looked so truthful that Miss Arden was moved and said:

"Certainly I will hear what you have to say, my child, for something tells me that you are here for my good."

"Thank you, for it is to serve you that I am here, and it is so important indeed, that I urge you, should Mr. Labuzan call before you hear all, to excuse yourself to him and hear me through."

Miss Arden arose and said:

"Come with me to my rooms, Miss Chandler," and calling the servant she told him to request Mr. Labuzan to excuse her from a ride, as she had just found it impossible for her to go.

She led the way then to her elegantly furnished little parlor, library and studio combined on the second floor, with her bed-chamber and dressing-rooms adjoining, and bade her visitor be seated.

Her face had lost its color and something seemed to tell her that she must nerve herself to hear something of a very unpleasant nature.

"What I have to say, Miss Arden, I will explain briefly, and I feel very sorry to have to give you pain, while I hope you will pardon me if I ask some impertinent questions."

"I will be glad to hear all that you have to say, and I will not feel offended, my child."

"You have known Mr. Labuzan for years?"

"I met him three years ago, when I came out, and he had just returned from Mexico."

"He was in Mexico for some years, I believe?"

"Yes."

"You are reported engaged to him?"

"This is a pointed question; but I am, though the engagement has not yet been announced."

"Ah! Miss Arden, do you love him very much?" came the next question.

Miss Arden smiled at the question and the earnestness of the young girl, but then became at once serious and said:

"I hope that you do not."

"I despise him, for he is deceiving you," was the very energetic response.

"Indeed this is a severe charge to make,"

"I can prove it, for I know that he has a wife living, and—"

Miss Arden was on her feet in an instant, her face white now, and she cried:

"Beware! for you are making a charge that would ruin Scott Labuzan."

"Say that you do not love him enough for it to hurt you, and I will be glad."

"I will say it would not hurt me to know it now, near as much as to learn the truth when too late."

"In fact, I will be honest with you, for though I admire Mr. Labuzan, find him charming company, I yet do not love him as I have hoped I would learn to some day, and this match is rather the making of my uncle and aunt than mine: but do you assert that he is a married man?"

"He is, and more still, as I will prove to you; but let me tell you that Nananita, the Mexican dancer, is his wife."

"Can this be possible?" and Ethel Arden was greatly shocked.

"It is, for I have her word for it, and she followed him here."

"And what says he of this charge?"

"He does not know that it is known, and to still keep the secret, he hired an assassin to take her life."

"Great God! I cannot believe this, for can he be so double-faced?"

"Yes, for here is the proof in his own writing, his card with Nananita's address on it, given the assassin, with this money, and an I. O. U. payable when the deed is done, for that is what it means."

"I came to save you, Miss Arden, without a public scandal, for once you were very kind to a boy friend of mine who was sick and needed your aid, and I know well your deeds of charity."

"But you are told the truth now, and on Sunday night Mr. Labuzan will be arrested on a charge of a conspiracy to kill, and before he is, I wished you free from him."

"In Heaven's name who are you?" and Miss Arden was trembling now.

"You will betray me no more than to say what you know of me?"

"I will keep your secret."

"I am known as Queen, the Girl Ferret, and I can tell you no more, only beg of you not to betray your knowledge to Mr. Labuzan, while if you wish all proof of his perfidy, go and visit Nananita, the Mexican dancer, for she has it."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECRET SERVICE CHIEF GETS MYSTERIOUS INFORMATION.

A MAN whose power is undisputed, a man whose face men fear, who is looked upon with awe, and who holds a power that controls the great barrier between vice and virtue, who protects the honest man from the criminal in the great metropolis of America, the chief of the Secret Service, sat alone in his private office reading a letter handed to him by a man in seedy attire, and with a haggard look, who stood respectfully before him.

"Where did you get this letter?" came in a low, stern voice from the chief, and he fixed upon him a look that had read many a criminal through and through.

"It was given to me, sir," and the man calmly met the eye of the great chief.

"Who gave it to you?"

"An old gentleman, sir."

"Describe him."

"He was slender in frame and bent, with gray hair, a beardless face, gold spectacles, carried a gold-headed cane and was well dressed."

"Where was he?"

"On Fourteenth street near Sixth avenue."

"When did you get it?"

"Half an hour ago, sir, for I walked here."

"Do you know him?"

"I do not, sir."

"How came he to give it to you?"

The man hesitated.

"Tell me."

"I will tell you, sir, though I suppose I place myself in trouble by doing so."

"I wish the truth."

The man looked the chief squarely in the face and said:

"You shall have the truth, cost me what it may, for I would tell a lie to no man."

"Well?"

"I am from the South, sir, and I am a literary man."

"Yes."

"I support an old mother and a father who is crippled and who was a Confederate soldier, and you know they get no pensions."

"Yes, I know," impatiently said the chief.

"I was doing fairly well, but was cut down in my prices by the publishers, for the times are hard, sir, and came to New York hoping to do better."

"This is a long story."

"A true one nevertheless, and you asked for the truth."

"Go on!"

"I started North with a couple of hundred dollars in my pocket, met on the way a man who was ill, and I did all in my power for him."

"I thought he was honest, cashed a check for him, and arrived here with but twenty dollars."

"All my efforts to obtain work were useless, and my money went, I could get none from home, and in my despair, after walking the streets for two nights and having but one meal, I was forced to beg, and the one I asked was the old gentleman who gave me that letter."

"Did he help you?"

"He asked me if I was a beggar, and I answered that for the first time in my life I was, and then at his request I told him my story."

"And then?"

"He took that letter out of his pocket and said:

"I wish this letter to go the Chief of the Secret Service, and in a way that he will not know how it is received."

"He will appreciate the contents, and if you will take it to him, and I will trust you to do so, I will give you ten dollars."

"Well?"

"I told him I would be glad to take it and if he would give me his address I would some day return the money."

"And then?"

"He said he would give me no address, but if I gave him my name and an address that would reach me, I would hear from him."

"I had money enough to go to the cheap hotel where I lived and redeem my sachel, for I owed but six dollars, and I gave that address."

"Well?"

"Then he handed me two five-dollar bills with that letter to be delivered to you personally, and I brought it to you."

"That is all that you can tell?"

"All, sir."

"Write then your name and address."

"My own home?"

"Yes."

The man did so.

"Now where you live in the city."

Again the man obeyed.

The chief touched a bell and to the one who answered it said:

"Take this telegram to the office and rush an answer."

"Now, sir, have you that ten dollars the old man gave you?"

"It was in two five-dollar bills, sir."

"You have them?"

"Here they are, sir."

"Have you the false check given you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

The man took it from his pocket and

handed it to the chief, who carefully examined it.

"This is for a hundred and seventy dollars."

"Did you go to the bank?"

"I did, sir."

"And with what result?"

"I was told that the check was worthless, sir."

Again the chief touched the bell and to the attendant said:

"Send two detectives here."

The men entered and to one he said:

"Take this check to the bank and learn when it was presented and by whom and the report on it."

To the other:

"Go to this address and see if a man by this name stopped there, when he arrived, when he left and if he owes anything at the hotel and how much, with the reason for his leaving."

"Sit down there, my man," said the chief and the man obeyed, while the chief again took up the letter which he had brought and read it over again.

Soon one of the detectives returned with a report and the chief made no reply.

A short while after the other came back and made his report and still the chief remained silent and went on with his work.

Then came a man with an answer to the telegram, and the chief spoke:

"Mr. Innis, you have told me the truth, as this telegram says, and also my men have reported from the bank and hotel."

"I need an extra clerk, you write a good hand, so go in and report to my chief clerk as an assistant, until you can better your condition," and the man who had brought the chief a mysterious letter walked away like one in a dream.

CHAPTER XIV.

THAT MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

WHEN the messenger of the mysterious letter had left the room, in company with an attendant, the chief took up the large envelope he had brought and again opened it.

He touched a bell and to the one who answered said:

"Ask Captain Williams to come here."

The captain soon entered, a handsome, manly looking fellow who was liked by honest men, and feared by evil-doers.

"Say, Williams, I have a letter here which I wish you to read aloud and it is confidential of course."

"Certainly, chief," and Captain Williams read as follows:

"CHIEF:—

"Again I force myself upon your notice, for I have an important communication to make."

"You have heard of, if not seen, the woman who is all the rage now, and known as Nananita the Mexican dancer?"

"Well, she is from Vera Cruz, was born of rich parents there, married an American adventurer then in Mexico, and he deserted her six years or more ago."

"Her father lost his money and she took to the stage to support him and her mother."

"She made a great hit as a dancer and received offers from American managers, one of whom marked a New York paper and sent it to her."

"She reads and speaks English, and after reading the notice of herself, her eyes fell upon a name well-known to her—her husband's."

"She saw him spoken of as a fashionable club man, and again as one who was expected soon to wed a beauty and an heiress here."

"She accepted the offer of the American manager, came to New York, settled herself in quiet quarters and made a hit."

"She wrote for her husband to come and see her."

"He obeyed."

"But he laughed at her assertion that he had really married her, and offered her terms to keep silent.

"She refused for the sake of the one he would make wretched, and she demanded that he should save all scandal and publicly be again united to her, or she would expose him.

"He refused, asked for time and she gave half the time he wished.

"She has with her the full certified proof of her marriage to him, from the priest, the alcalde, the witnesses and all, fully sworn to, and the witnesses as well, while she has several photographs of him.

"The time he asked was to get her out of the way, and to do this he plotted with an Italian youth to kill her.

"In return the youth was to rob her and besides get so much pay.

"One hundred and twenty dollars was paid in advance, and I send the money herewith, so keep it subject to demand.

"The within I. O. U. for five hundred was also given and you will understand when it was to be paid.

"The lady to whom this 'fast man about town is engaged' is Miss Ethel Arden, but she must be kept out of the scandal if possible, for her engagement was not public.

"The plan of assassination was for the Italian youth—Natto Nortoni—to go on Sunday night to the home of Senorita Nananita, when her maid was out and she was alone, and do his red work.

"Do you go there at that time and she will expect you.

"You must state that you caught the Italian and jailed him.

"That is necessary, for the real assassin must think he told on him when caught in the dancer's rooms, and gave the whole snap away.

"Then you can go and see Mr. Scott Labuzan—for he is the man—at his rooms, and arrest him.

"As for the Italian youth he does not exist, and it was all a put up job to entrap Labuzan, but for the safety of one other, should he escape, the story of the capture of the pretended assassin must go.

"Record this as another score in the book of
Your Unknown

"POLICE."

"Well, Williams, there you have it."

"Yes, sir, and I would be willing to give six months pay if I could fasten upon who this Unknown Ferret is."

"So would I, but he is right in it, to use a slang."

"Every time, chief."

"Can it be some of our best detectives who are playing it upon us by secret work, and will come in some day and claim the rewards they have won?"

"I am more and more in the dark," answered the chief, thoughtfully.

"How did you get this letter, sir?"

The chief told, and the captain shook his head.

"He certainly outwits us, sir."

"Each time."

"You have no suspicion, sir?"

"Not the faintest."

"Well, sir, it is a mystery we must solve, for, if I mistake not he has sent in information that gives him large rewards."

The chief turned to a book on which was written:

"THE UNKNOWN'S BOOK."

Opening it there were a number of letters revealed, and quite a page of accounts.

"Yes, he has a big account against us, and which I have banked in his favor.

"You see his seal of black on each letter, a skull held in a human hand and one of flesh clasped—that is his crest."

"Well, chief, I am baffled completely; but you intend to act upon this letter?"

"Just as surely as if you had brought me the information yourself, though never had I any suspicion that Labuzan was a crook."

CHAPTER XV.

A WOMAN'S WAY.

THERE was a thrill ran through fashionable life in New York, when it was announced that Scott Labuzan, a man supposed to be vastly rich, had been arrested in his rooms on Sunday night as an intended assassin.

The story came out that years before he had secretly entered into a marriage with a Mexican girl, had deserted her and learning that she was dead, as he stated, he had expected to wed a rich heiress of New York, when she appeared.

The name of the Mexican girl, and of the heiress were soon to be given, but society had its suspicions, yet could not understand how the popular Labuzan had entered into a plot with the Italian to put the Mexican woman out of the way.

But the Italian hireling was said to be in the clutches of the chief of police and the Mexican confessed all, so that Scott Labuzan had been taken into custody.

Several days passed and then came another surprise, and it was in effect that no charge had been made in court against the Italian or the real intended assassin, Scott Labuzan, that she had let it go by default, that both had been released, and then it was found that the accused clubman had suddenly left town.

His creditors had come upon him for their money, it was found that he was not worth a dollar, and so he had left the city.

Following this came the announcement that the beautiful Mexican dancer, Nananita, had canceled all of her engagements and returned to Mexico, and a paragraph stated that:

"Miss Ethel Arden, supposed to have been the heiress whom Labuzan was to marry, had gone to Europe with her uncle and aunt, sailing several days before the arrest of her alleged lover, and it was stated that she would be absent several years."

"Well, Williams, how does all this strike you?" said the Secret Service Chief to his captain, as the two sat together in the former's private office, the day after Nananita's departure from the city.

"Chief, it strikes me that a woman is as uncertain as clouds and sunshine, for I was sure that Nananita wanted to hang Labuzan if she could find law enough to do it."

"Why she told me she would glory in seeing him hang, and then, woman that she is, and consummate actress as well, she comes here in disguise pretending to be his sister, or some one comes for her, as the one I saw spoke English with no accent, and got a permit to visit him."

"It was the Mexican woman who saw him I am sure, and look at the result!"

"She canceled her engagements, made no appearance against him, and the two skipped off together in the Havana steamer yesterday, he leaving thirty thousand dollars in debts behind him, and she saving him, after being willing to hang him."

"Oh Lord! if there were only somebody who could understand a woman and would write a book on her, what a sale it would have—here is her letter to me," and the chief handed out a letter which Captain Williams read aloud as follows:

"You will feel hurt that I allow one you deem a criminal to escape, by my not appearing against him, but in my eyes he is not now one to condemn, for he has assured me that he believed me dead, and he deserted me because he thought I loved another, so I forgive him."

"He did not plot, he says, to kill me, and the story of the Italian boy was but a lie to get money from me, to blackmail him."

"How you got a suspicion of what was going on he does not know, nor does he care

now, for again he is the one I love, and we leave this country for my own, where we will be forever happy."

"With this explanation of why I leave you to make what explanation you please, I remain with thanks for your services."

"NANANITA THE MEXICAN."

"Well, what do you think, chief?"

"That Labuzan is a dandy, to win over one he so wronged."

"You still believe all as reported to you?"

"Of course."

"And do not think your informant, the Unknown Ferret, may have been wrong?"

"Not I; it was only the way a woman has, and seeing him she forgave him, and in time she will find the devil was as black as she once believed him."

"Of course the Italian boy must go free too."

"Oh, yes, being as you never had him in your possession; but I would like to know what the Unknown Ferret thinks of this miscarriage of his clever tracking down a crime?"

CHAPTER XVI.

UNDER SUSPICION.

WHAT, as Captain Williams had said, "the Unknown Ferret thought of it," must now be told.

Of course the reader has recognized how thoroughly the chief of the Boy Police League had run down a mystery, solved a crime and successfully brought a villain where just punishment appeared to be an assured thing for his crimes.

With the cue given him by Queen, when she went as a messenger to the home of Nananita the Mexican, New York Nat had scented a crime, and at once he had shadowed it.

He had played his cards well in his visit to Labuzan as an Italian youth, and then to Nananita as an informant of the plot against her.

His girl ally, Queen, had equally as well played her part in her visit to Ethel Arden, and there the two young ferrets had dropped out, leaving all in the hands of the real officers of the law, after the delivery of the letter sent to the chief of the Secret Service.

But the surprise of New York Nat, when he discovered that the Mexican woman had gone back to the man who had deserted her and sought to put her out of the way, so that he could wed an heiress and save himself from financial ruin, knew no bounds.

"What do you think of it, Queen?" he asked as he hastened to the cottage of Mrs. Herbert where Queen made her home, serving as governess for that lady's two children for no other reward than her board.

"Well, Nat, she's a woman you know," was the philosophical response of the young girl when the story had been told her of the Mexican woman's act.

"I suppose that settles it, Queen; but the chief will think I am a fraud, I fear?"

"Oh no he won't, and if he does you will soon set him right with other information that will be sure to turn out all right."

"If there is not a woman in the case," dubiously said New York Nat.

"Well, Nat, I'm a woman, or soon will be I suppose, and yet I do not understand my sex enough to say just what to expect of them."

"But you belong to the other sex, so what do you intend to do now?"

"I will call a special council, and go the rounds at once to do it, for the boys may have some good news that will offset this botch."

"It is no botch, Nat, for your work was well done."

"And yours."

"So don't cry over spilt milk, and set to work again."

"I'll do it."

"How about Sykes?"

"Oh! he has a big appetite, sleeps and reads, but kicks like a mule at his imprisonment and says he will kill me some day."

"He would if he could stab you in the back; but does Guard watch him well?"

"Queen, that dog is almost human, for he keeps his ears and eyes on Sykes all the time."

"You know there is a hole in the cellar wall?"

"Yes."

"Guard found it, by jumping up against the wall, and a door opened."

"The door was painted like the brick wall, and I thought it was, until Guard got me by the coat-tail and led me down there to look."

"And what is it Nat?"

"I do not know yet, but it is a low, narrow tunnelway that leads back into the ground somewhere, over toward the cemetery, and you have to creep in to go through, while it is damp and dismal; but I shall rig up and go in there soon with Keno, or one of the other boys."

"Let Guard go first."

"Oh yes, he does that and seems to want me to follow him."

"Nat!"

"Yes, Queen?"

"I'll go with you."

"Oh Queen!"

"Why not, for am I not one of the band?"

"All right, you go with me, but you must rig out in boy's clothes, wear heavy boots and go as I do."

"I'll do it, and we'll explore the mysterious tunnel together, for if there is any glory in it, I want my share."

"Good for you, Queen; but do you know I am going to get another prisoner for the old Haunted House?"

"Oh Nat! has another of the band turned traitor?" asked Queen in dismay.

"No indeed, and we can tie to our boys I am sure; but Chub found out a secret."

"What is it?"

"If you are a woman I'll tell you, for you can keep a secret, as I have found out."

"Yes, tell me."

"Well, Chub knows two young girls whose mother died lately, and sent for a lawyer when she was dying."

"Yes, Nat."

"The girls did not know just what took place, but they feel sure, and always had the idea, that their mother had money, and considerable of it."

"She sent them to school, paid all bills, and yet never had an income, save money in bank, and then it appeared to be only a few hundreds, and she then went to another bank and so on."

"When she died the lawyer paid the funeral expenses, and then told them he would get them places to work, and gave them each fifty dollars, that was all; but they told Chub their mother, when in good health, had said they would never know want, and just as soon as she died, the income ceased, so they think there is something wrong and asked his opinion."

"Chub took the case, and he came to me about it, and we began to figure on the lawyer."

"And found him crooked?"

"Not yet, but I found out that he had been a poor man with little practice, up to the time of the lady's death a year ago, and since then he had bought his house, paying fifteen thousand cash for it, had furnished it well and was paying attention to a rich widow."

"Now, where did he get that money, and also enough to buy a horse and buggy, join a club and appear like a rich man, for he has several thousands in bank."

"That looks bad, Nat."

"So bad that Chub and I are going to kidnap him, take him to the Haunted House and see what he can tell about his sudden

riches, and make him pony up to the girls if he stole their money."

"Do it, Nat, for I'll wager he is a thief," was Queen's energetic reply.

CHAPTER XVII.

NAT ON HIS ROUNDS.

NEW YORK NAT left the cottage where Queen made her home, and started upon his rounds.

Queen was really what he called his "side partner," for her advice was always good, and he knew he could depend upon her under all circumstances.

When he went to see her he always dressed well, appearing like some youth who had a rich father.

He did this so as not to compromise her in any way, and also to look as though he might be a smart young man visiting her when the neighbors saw him going there, for that he was her brother was kept a secret from all.

Leaving the cottage he went on his way to the nearest cars and took them downtown.

He walked along the wharves, apparently examining the shipping with interest, and halted on a pier where he found a youth who appeared idle.

It was Shorty, one of his band.

"Well, Cap, you is got up fine," said Shorty.

"Yes, I am disguised as a young gentleman," was Nat's smiling response, and Shorty grinned and replied:

"You is a gent, no matter what yer is togged in."

"We neither of us drink, Shorty, so I cannot offer to treat; but any news?"

"There was one of them Englishers that wears striped clothes, same as if they was just out of prison, made a try to come it on the inspector of customs for a noodles, and slipped a double X in his hand."

"I goes to the inspector and tells him it were seen, that a shadow man was onder him, and to fasten the English guy before he walked off."

"He took me for common sense, and asked the checked suit what that double X meant, and handed it back to him."

"Checked clothes got mad, but it were no go, and his traps were gone over and a lot found that cheated our Uncle Sam out of a clean ten thousand dollar bill, and more, he were recognized then as a big smuggler and run in."

"And the inspector of customs?"

"I went to him but he laughed at me when I asked him for an X."

"Point him out."

"He's in the office, but his name is Donix."

New York Nat walked to the office, when he had Shorty's description of the man and picked him out, so called him aside.

"See here, Donix, unless you play square with the boy who kept you from going to prison, I'll report you to the chief and send you there."

"Who are you, youngster?"

"I know it all, and I have the badge—see!"

The man saw the badge of a United States Detective and wilted, and New York Nat hastened to say:

"Now all I ask, for I do not wish to jail you, is that you play square with that boy."

"What can I do for him?"

"You were seen to take money from that smuggler, and you went back on the boy who warned you, so had a chance to escape detection and play honest."

"There are more in this game than you know, and they saw you go back on the boy."

"I am in it from A to Zebra, and I tell you frankly that your view scenery from between iron bars unless you play it square."

"My God! what can I do?"

"In the first place pay that boy the double X that was offered you, then go and call on the chief of the Secret Service and tell him privately, that had you not been informed by a boy—yes call him Unknown Ferret—you would have never found the smuggler out."

"This will help you with the chief, and it will help the boy, for you know he is in it."

"In what?"

"In the game."

"What game?"

"The Secret Service, see?"

"What, boys?"

"Yes, don't be a fool, but do as I say, and mind you, you'll be shadowed to the chief's office, but the boy knows who you are and so took pity on you and warned you."

"Will you go?"

"God bless you, I will."

"Have you got the double X about you to give the boy?"

"Yes."

"Then call him when I leave," and New York Nat walked away.

But, from a distance he watched the customs officer approach Shorty, got the latter's signal that it was all right, and then went on his way, confident that he had added another good deed to the list in favor of the Unknown Ferrets, or Boy Police, in the mind of the chief, and frightened the man into doing his duty for some time to come.

His next visit was to the Fall River steamer, and there he found Slim on the watch.

"Any news, Slim?"

"Yes, cap'n, heaps, for I'm sure that a fellow is getting off with somebody's boodle."

"Why?"

"He came down early and got a state-room, and then he came and played the sick dodge, and asked if he could go to bed."

"Yes."

"He was given the key, and I went up and give a colored steward a V to just let me into the next state-room."

"My gimlet made an eye-hole, and he was at it."

"At what?"

"Counting the boodle."

"Well?"

"I seen him tear up checks, I took 'em to be, count money, gold and paper, and look over a bag of jewelry, and he put all in a tin box on which I seen the name of Metcalf, Merwin & Co."

"Yes."

"He left the box out, put the torn checks into it, and intends to toss it overboard to-night when the boat gets off."

"And the money and bag?"

"He tied all in the lining of his coat."

"Stay here, Slim, and if he goes to leave the boat, ask an officer to hold him," and New York Nat walked rapidly away.

Going into a District Messenger's office, he asked for a Directory, looked up the address of Metcalf, Merwin & Co., and then sat down and made the following note, which he addressed to the Secret Service chief, or the "next in authority":

"Send officers to Fall River Line, State-room No. 30, and arrest occupant, registered as Bowen Zeigler, who has with him a tin-box he has stolen, and in which will be found checks, or drafts, torn up, to toss all overboard when boat leaves."

"Search him and you will find money, gold and paper, and bag of valuables."

"He is playing sick."

"The boat sails at 5:30, so you have only three hours for your work."

"If customs inspector comes to you with report that boy discovered smuggler, and informed him, set that down, and this information, to, as before,

"YOUR UNKNOWN FERRET."

Hiring a boy that could be trusted to go, with a promise of reaching his destination before he turned gray, New York Nat paid him double for his work and started him off, but caught a cab and following a car watched him until he saw him enter the Secret Service Headquarters.

Then he drove to the lower part of Broadway and left his cab, once more going on the rounds of his band, having told Slim just what to do, after he saw his man in the hands of the officers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NAT TAKES THEM ALL IN.

At the Wall street Ferry New York Nat found Chub.

He was calling out:

"Shine yer boots!

"All for a nickel."

He got a chance to "shine" Nat, and the latter said:

"Well, Chub, have you had any news from your lawyer?"

"He's got a friend, who has a small yacht, and sometimes he sails up the river with him when there is a good breeze, instead of taking the cars."

"Find out who his friend is?"

"I knows."

"How large is the yacht?"

"It's sloop rig, and about thirty feet."

"How many in crew?"

"One man."

"Find out when he expects to run up again, pay him to lay off, and arrange that the owner misses the boat, and I'll send Blow to you, for he is a sailor as well as you, and can run the lawyer up, delay all you can, and I'll meet you on the river and we'll fasten him."

"Not kill him?"

"Don't take me for a fool, Chub, for I am not one; we will kidnap him and gorge that plunder he has stolen from the girls."

"Cap, you are a dandy."

"I'll send Blow to you, and here is money to bribe the skipper of the yacht with," and Nat handed over a very snug roll of bills.

"Oh, the skipper's all right, for he was kicking for his pay yesterday, and said he had a chance to go as mate on a coaster up the Kennebec."

"See that he does," and Nat walked away in search of Blow, whose station was in the neighborhood of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Blow was found at his post, and a few words were spoken to him in a low tone and New York Nat passed on.

Keno was the next of the band visited, and his place was in a part of town where Nat knew that he made a mistake to go well-dressed, for the hoodlums there loved a shining mark for their low wit.

But he was anxious to make his rounds, see that the boys were on duty and tell them to come to the special meeting that night in the Haunted House.

It took but a few minutes for the hoodlums to "get on to him," and at once cries began of:

"Get on to his Nibs!"

"Do you mind his elegant git up?"

"Shoot that hat!"

"Come off your perch, Birdie!"

"Fine feathers makes fine birds, but that's a crow."

And so the cries continued until at last Nat spied Keno and went toward him rapidly.

He had received the jeers good-naturedly, but when one youth ran and dropped down in front of him and another tried to throw him down by shoving him over the prostrate hoodlum, Nat's good right fist shot out and the insulter was knocked squarely off his feet.

"He's got sand."

"You got it that time, Spunky," and other cries arose.

But Spunky was the bully of the neighbor-

hood, and in the habit of knocking others down from sheer love of deviltry, he did not understand how it was that he had been floored, in fact thought it was an accident, and peeling off his tattered apology for a coat he called out, as he squared himself:

"Yer can't do that ag'in, cully."

He was taller and heavier than Nat by several inches and a score of pounds, and his brute strength and certain science made him dreaded by all, as well as being admired.

"See here, I do not wish trouble with you."

"You tried to trip me and I hit back, so that ought to square us."

"I came here to find a friend I heard was in hard luck, and I do not care to be insulted, and want nothing to do with you."

So spoke Nat to Spunky the "Boss of Slum Alley," as he was called.

But while the crowd cheered Spunky squared himself and said:

"But I wants suthin' ter do with you, my fine one, so look out, for there is no cops in sight and I intends ter lick yer, ter larn yer ther tune we sings down here."

With that Spunky made a pass at New York Nat, who, quick as a flash warded off the blow, but did not strike back.

"I'm after yer, sonny, so here goes," and Spunky made another stroke.

Then Nat said, as he once more guarded his face skillfully:

"I've got to lick you, that's certain."

In an instant he assumed the offensive and Spunky got one on the nose, another on the cheek, while a third knocked him out squarely.

A hush fell upon the crowd, for their king was dethroned by a well-dressed chap, one they had picked up for a dudelet, as they had called him.

They little dreamed that Nat had been through it all, as sailor boy and rounder, and knew their tricks and ways most thoroughly.

"Prick him with yer sticker, Spunky," cried one of the bully's toadies, and Spunky arose knife in hand.

"Hold on there, for I has a play in this game, for this be a pard of mine," cried a voice, and Keno, whose range was with that very gang, sprung between the bully and his young captain.

"Ho, I was looking for you when that fellow hit onto me," said Nat, standing ready to defend himself against Spunky's attack.

"I is glad ter see yer, pard, and I wants you fellars to know this is a friend of mine, and a good one—that goes," and Keno looked Spunky squarely in the eyes.

"Ef he's *your* pal, Keno, I'll let up on him; but he's got no biz in this part o' town," said Spunky.

Nat laughed and replied:

"The town is free, and so are the people."

"Come, Keno, I wish to speak to you," and the two walked off together, leaving Spunky wiping the blood from his face, for Nat had hit hard, and with the dissatisfied feeling that he had lost his grip with the gang, for a glance at his fellows told him that.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PLAN FOR THE PRISONER.

"It's a wonder you got out of that alive, cap'n," said Keno as the two walked off together.

"Them clothes don't go in these parts, save in shop windows."

"I know that well, Keno, but I wished to see you and so risked them."

"You knocked Spunky out beautiful, and that won the gang your way; but is anything up?"

New York Nat told Keno why he wished to see him, and then walked rapidly on his way, his companion returning, as he said:

"To see how much Spunky's feelin's was hurt."

Teaser was the next member of the band visited, and he held a partnership in a newsstand with two other youths, but they did not belong to the Boy Police League.

Doc was found at a drug-store, his usual resort on the Bowery, and Fatty was a runner in for a cheap restaurant and got his meals for his work.

Then Nat went up-town to a hotel where Flip was a bell-boy, and hunted Freckles out in a messenger-boys' office, and so completed his rounds by finding Parson perambulating about the streets, for he was what was called a "circulating member."

The boys had all been found at their posts, and then Nat hastened on up-town to the restaurant where he generally got his meals, and there ate his supper, for he was not fashionable, and ate his dinner at noon.

Having ordered supper put up in the can for his prisoner, he set off for the Haunted House, watched his chance and slipped into the grounds.

He made his way through the thick growth of trees and bushes, entered the cellar door, lighted his lantern he kept hidden there, and as he did so down the stairs bounded Guard with a low whine of welcome.

"Ho, old dog, I'll take you out for a long walk to-night," said Nat, and he went upstairs to the upper floor.

There sat Sykes at the table, his head resting on his arm, and his manacles now upon his feet, his hands being free.

"See here, New York Nat, I'm gittin' awful tired of this," he said savagely as the young captain entered.

"I do not doubt it, Sykes, and I am too, for you are a big care on my mind and time."

"Here is your supper."

"I hain't hungry."

"Keep it for your breakfast then."

"Why don't you set me free?"

"To betray us all, and just when we are working our way into favor with the police, though secretly."

"I'd keep your secret?"

"You'd sell us out at half-price."

"I'll die here."

"I guess not, for you look healthy enough, and your appetite is good."

"What do you intend to do with me?"

"The boys want to hang you."

"Bah! you dare not," but the prisoner turned pale all the same.

"I would not hear to such a thing, though had you had your way we would all have been jugged, on trumped-up charges, when they could not find real ones against us."

"You were doing well, earning a living, and yet you sought to betray us, so you have yourself only to blame; but the band holds a meeting here to-night, and I have a proposition to make to them about you."

"What is it?"

"I'll tell you frankly, and see what you say to it."

"Fire away."

"There is a fine clipper ship leaving New York for China, soon, and she goes from there on another long voyage and back again for a cargo of tea and then home again."

"Well?"

"It will take her a year and a half at the least, and I know one who has influence with her captain, and can get you on board, if you will swear to keep your mouth shut."

"I'll swear."

"Don't be too quick about it, but listen."

"Cold weather is coming and you would about freeze here, for we could not build a fire by daylight, so you would like to get free, and if you are willing to go down with me to that vessel, and sail on her for the voyage, I'll fit you out well, give you some money, and you can be drawing something for your services aboard ship, but mind you,

if you squeal on us, we'll hunt you down for it, and the next time you are in our power I'll not beg for you when the boys say you must hang.

"Go aboard this ship when she sails, and you will be free if the band agrees to my terms, though I know they will not wish to set you free."

"I'll do it, 'fore Heaven I will."

"All right, you will have to sign an oath before the band, and woe be unto you if you break it, and betray us, Sykes."

"I'll act square, for it's just what I'd like to do, go in a sailing ship on a long voyage."

"All right, we'll know soon."

"Now, eat your supper, and Guard will keep you company while I go down, and let the boys in, as it is time for them to be coming."

"I don't want the dog's comp'ny," growled Sykes, and he turned and attacked his supper vigorously, while Guard watched him, and refused to eat anything the prisoner offered him, and would accept no favors.

Guard was a dog but he knew his business.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MEETING OF THE CLAN.

The band arrived one and two at a time, and Guard eyed each one of them as they came in.

He would be friendly with only one other besides New York Nat, and that was the Queen of the League.

Up into the "Council Chamber" they went, and there burned several lanterns to give light for discussion.

The Queen had been the first to arrive, and she always had the seat of honor, Nat sitting near her and Parson acting as secretary, having paper, pen and ink before him, for the Boy Police believed in having their councils done according to strict form.

Keno had already whispered around how New York Nat had visited him in "Slumville," and knocked out the bully of that part of the town, and the gang there wanted him to come again, as he had given him, Keno, a couple of dollars and told him to treat the lot of hoodlums.

"Oh, he's no toy cap'n," said one admiringly, and with this the others all agreed.

Then the meeting was called to order by the Queen, and Nat took the floor.

"Mates," he said in his pleasant way:

"We must first discuss our prisoner, for we have got a white elephant on our hands as they say."

"Bit off more than we kin chaw," suggested Flip.

"About that, for he has to be fed and guarded, and generally cared for."

"I am not kicking on account of the work, but cold weather is about on us now, we cannot have fires here, and so he'll freeze some day."

"Serve him right."

"We do not wish to harm him, nor to have his life on our hands, so I have a proposition to make to you all."

Then New York Nat told just what his plan was.

There were dissenting voices of course, but as they could propose nothing better it had to go.

"My plan is to write a letter to the captain, supposing to come from a particular friend of his, for I know their relationship to each other, asking him to take a neighbor's boy on the voyage with him, meaning Sykes."

"He'll do it, I know, and I'll suggest in the letter that he is given to romancing, and not over good, but to set him to work with some pay, and fetch him back with him—I can write the letter all right."

"And then, cap'n?"

"We will ship him off the night the ship sails, several of us going down with him to see him off, and we can go by boat from the river shore here and put him right aboard."

"And he'll squeal then."

"I guess not, for he will have to sign a written oath in our presence to-night not to betray us in any way."

"If he does?"

"Well, we'll track him down then."

"When he comes back?"

"He will be gone over a year and a half and in that time I hope we will not have to be in hiding."

"Just write out the oath, cap'n, and we'll give him a chance to swear it," said Doc.

The oath was written and read over.

All approved it, and the prisoner was sent for.

He came with Guard close at his heels.

Sykes was very pale and somewhat nervous, in spite of the bold look that he assumed.

But the oath was read to him and he said that he would sign it.

"Remember, Sykes, we are not such fools as to remain here and let you betray us, if you see fit to break that oath, so unless you catch us all at one haul those you have not will be on your trail like bloodhounds, mark my words."

"I'm goin' ter act square, you bet, for you has with me, Nat."

"See that you do."

"Now sign that oath."

Queen handed him the pen and he slowly wrote his name—Sykes.

It was a severe oath to take, and one he would hardly dare break, and Queen wrote beneath,

"Witnessed,

"QUEEN OF THE BOY POLICE LEAGUE."

Then New York Nat made known what was to be given Sykes, a couple of suits of clothes, a heavy pea-jacket, storm-coat and hat, shoes and all that he would need, with fifty dollars in money.

"It will cost us about a hundred dollars," said Nat.

"I votes the chief takes the money from the treasury and pays it out as he sees fit," said Chub.

It was seconded by Flip, and the vote was unanimously carried.

Then Doc and Blow were selected as those to go with Nat to see the prisoner on board the ship, and the Queen said:

"Take the prisoner back to his room."

"His case has been decided."

He turned and glanced at her masked face and said:

"Will you tell me good-by, Queen?"

"Don't do it!"

"He don't deserve to touch your hand," cried several voices.

"I will do it."

"Yes, Sykes, I will bid you good-by and wish you success in life, only try and be true to your friends as well as yourself."

"Good-by!"

She grasped his hand and felt it tremble, and Doc and Blow led him back to his prison in silence, for there were none who would bid him good-by among those whom he had betrayed, while Nat said:

"Of course my good-by will come later, Sykes."

Then the story was told of the capture of Labuzan, and how Nananita the Mexican had forgiven him the wrongs he had done her, and saved him from prison.

Other business was then gone over and at eleven o'clock the reports were all in and the band filed out of the Haunted House and went their separate ways, all save New York Nat and Queen for they had a special duty to perform that night.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE SECRET TUNNEL.

"Well, Nat, I am ready," said Queen, when the members of the secret league had all departed from the old mansion, and she threw off the large ulster that had completely concealed her form, for she had been the first to arrive at the meeting and had not left her seat all the evening.

Not one of the boys suspected the remarkable change in her the throwing off of her ulster would have made, for she appeared now rigged out as a boy.

She wore a pair of striped overall pants, a woolen shirt, with a cravat knotted under the collar, and a pair of heavy, rough boots.

"Oh, Queen! what a boy you would make," cried Nat, and as he spoke she put on her head a slouch hat and resumed her mask.

"I am glad you like my get-up, Nat."

"But go and get ready for our voyage of discovery."

"You really wish to go on this underground trip with me?"

"You know I do."

"There is no backdown in me."

"I know that; but there is no telling what we will find."

"Let us go and see."

"All right, I split a lot of fat pine wood for the torches this afternoon, which will give a brighter light than the lanterns, and now I'll go and rig up."

With this Nat went to his own room while Queen walked to where Sykes was and had a talk with him and her kind words really moved the stony heart of the poor wretch who had plotted to betray his comrades.

Before going she had slipped on her ulster and mask again and he had said:

"I've got a favor to ask you, Queen?"

"Well?"

"I believe I'd be a better feller if I could see your face."

"Will you show it to me?"

Queen hesitated but an instant, and then she removed her mask.

"Oh, how pretty," said Sykes with honest admiration, and then came his words:

"I'm more sorry than ever I betrayed the gang now; but I half thought you was a boy, a-playing it on us."

"I'll not forget your face, Queen, never!"

"Well, good-by and luck to you," and Queen left the room just as Nat came for her.

"Nat?"

"Yes."

"Maybe I did wrong?"

"What did you do, Queen?"

"I showed my face to Sykes, for he asked it."

"I am sorry; but I guess it will be all right."

"Now we are ready."

"Come, Guard."

Guard was ready and anxious, he seemed to know there was some important scheme on hand, and when they descended to the cellar, each with a lantern, he darted on ahead and halted at the secret door in the massive brick wall.

The bundle of light wood was there, and telling Queen to carry it, Nat opened the door and the dog bounded into the dark tunnel exposed.

It was only a couple of feet in width, and about three in height, so that the two adventurers had to stoop down low to enter it.

The ground beyond the wall was muddy, showing the wisdom of wearing the heavy boots and the air was damp and unpleasant.

Nat had never gone beyond the entrance, but now pushed ahead after Guard.

A hundred feet or more they went and then Nat said:

"Queen."

"Yes, Nat."

"This leads directly toward the old graveyard."

"There may be an opening there?"

"Perhaps, in fact there is somewhere, for I feel air."

Another hundred feet was passed, and then another.

"Queen?"

"Hello."

"We are in the graveyard I am sure, or under it."

"How do you know?"

"It is just a hundred yards from the rear door of the house to the graveyard wall, and we have come four hundred feet."

"Yes."

"And look there!"

Nat held up his lantern and there in the side of the tunnel was a human skull half-exposed.

"Oh, Nat!"

"Do you wish to go back?"

"Not I."

"Then on we go."

"Where is Guard?"

"On ahead somewhere."

So on they went for another hundred feet, and then before them the tunnel suddenly narrowed.

Nat halted and examined it closely.

"It is brick-work, and to me, Queen, this hole looks very much like one of those niches they put bodies in in the old vaults."

"It does so, Nat," and Queen carefully examined the brick tunnel-way before her.

It was about three feet in height, two in width and the top was arched.

"Where is Guard?" again asked Queen, for all was blackness ahead of them.

In answer to her words came a low whine from Guard at the other end of the bricked tunnel.

"All right, Guard, we are coming," said Nat, and he added:

"I'll crawl in alone, Queen."

"No you won't, for I'll be close on your heels," was the plucky answer.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

NEW YORK NAT crawled through the tunnel, shoving his lantern ahead of him, and close at his heels came Queen.

She was as fearless as was the boy.

At length Nat halted, raised his lantern and looked ahead of him.

"Queen?"

"Yes."

"We are in a vault."

"Your old quarters, Nat?"

"No, another vault, and a large and old one."

"It smells like the dead."

"Get in and I'll follow you."

"O. K."

"Is Guard there?"

"He is and so is something also."

"What is it?"

"A dead man."

With this Nat crawled into the vault and stood up, Queen at once following him. It was a vault they were in, and one crumbling to decay.

There were the niches for the coffins on one side, but molded over so as to look like a brick wall, and the inscriptions on the slabs could be seen.

Only one of the niches was open, a bottom one through which they had entered the vault.

On the other side was a massive iron door, but it was closed, and air came through small openings in it near the bottom.

The vault was a large one, damp, rusty, and dismal in the extreme.

But that was not all, for Guard stood wagging his tail at a find he had made.

The dog seemed happy that his cavern had been explored and had the look on his face as though he was saying:

"I told you to do it."

What Guard was looking at was a human form, or rather the dried up remains of what once had been a man.

For years that form had lain there, slowly changing to dust.

The clothing had rotted away, but there was a blanket half spread over the skeleton form, which lay on its back, its hands by its side.

But that was not all, for a gun lay by it, a musket, and picking it up, Nat found that it was heavy with rust.

The shoes and hat of the man were in one corner, while near this gun were two large leather mail-bags, heavily riveted.

The locks had not been broken, but the leather had been cut along the tops and the contents looked over.

Upon the ground lay several batches of letters, and picking up one New York Nat said, as he held it out to the Girl Queen of the Boy Police League, who had lighted the fine splinters and was holding the flaming torch above her head, as she gazed appalled at their discovery:

"See, Queen, all of these letters have money in them—they were registered packages."

"Yes, Nat; but what does it mean?"

"It looks as though this man had robbed the mails and came here to hide, and the door shut to on him—see here."

He picked up a note-book as he spoke and glanced at it.

"Queen?"

"Yes."

"I'll stick something through these holes so we can find this vault from the outside tomorrow, and now let us see what this says."

On the back of the note-book was a name:

"CLIFTON FONDA—

"U. S. Mail Rider."

Within the book, besides some accounts and notes, was written with pencil, all the rest being in ink, and scrawled in a tremulous hand:

"I was held up on the highway by a man I recognized, so he brought me here and locked me in this vault."

"In vain have I shouted for help, and now I am dying."

"Why he did not come back God only knows, for the letters and all were left here until he could return the next night and rob them; but I had wounded him and he hurried away to a physician."

"Perhaps he is dead—I soon will be, and God have mercy on my soul."

"CLIFTON FONDA,

"Mail Rider."

"Poor fellow" said Queen.

"Yes, poor fellow indeed."

"This note-book solves a mystery that some one will be glad to know," said New York Nat, and he placed the note-book on the breast of the skeleton, piled the letters all up carefully, and having stuck several splinters of the pine torch through the holes in the iron door, he said:

"We have made one discovery, Queen, so let us go."

"I am willing," was the ready answer, and Queen led the way through the tunnel.

Nat made all look as though the discovery had been made from the outside, and then followed.

"I must get some bricks, Queen, and wall up that rear end, for should they see it open, they will investigate."

"Sure."

"I will help you."

It was hard work, but it was done, and Nat felt that even if a lantern light was thrown in the niche it would look as though there had been no opening there.

Then the two returned to the mansion, and calling to Guard to follow him, Nat escorted Queen home, both of them much impressed by their find in the vault, the dread secret of a crime in the far past.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECRET OF THE VAULT.

NAT was tired, and when he returned to his quarters in the Haunted House at once went to sleep, while Guard, having greatly enjoyed his outing, went to his duty as sentinel over the prisoner once more.

But Queen did not readily go to sleep, for the discovery in the vault had been a great shock to her, nervy girl that she was.

When he arose the next morning, Nat went after his breakfast, and returned with a meal for his prisoner and Guard as well.

Then he scaled the wall in the rear of the mansion and sauntered through the old, long-deserted graveyard.

He took his bearings as he regarded them, and his memory of how the tunnel ran, and soon came to a large mound.

There was the vault, for through the iron door stuck the splinters he had placed there the night before.

The vault bore a date on it of years ago and was in sad decay.

The door was heavy, closed tight and with an iron bar across it, resting in blockets, and a broken lock that had held it there lay on the ground.

Removing the bar, with it Nat pried the iron door open and there beheld his skeleton.

"That is all right."

"Now to make my discovery known to the chief," and so saying Nat replaced the bar and returned to the mansion.

There he wrote a note, sealed it with black wax and stamped it with the gruesome seal of the Boy Police League.

Leaving the mansion again he went down to the messenger office where Freckles worked and asked him to go on a message for him.

"Take this to the Chief of the Secret Service, Freckles."

"You bet."

"Deliver it to him in person."

"Cert."

"Watch him while he reads it, and tell him that a young man gave it to you and paid you for the errand."

"Hain't seen the pay yet."

"Business is business, boss."

Nat handed him a dollar with a smile, and said:

"Now do the errand, Freckles, and come up to-night and report at nine o'clock."

"I'll be there," and Freckles was off like a shot, his comrades wondering at his haste and betting that he had gotten a good fee and his speed would come down to a snail's pace when he got out of sight of the one who sent him on his errand.

In this they were mistaken, for Freckles was now working for his own interest as one of the Boy Police League.

"I wants to see the chief," he said, presenting himself at Secret Service Headquarters.

"What do you want with him?"

"That's my own business."

"You'll not see him."

"See here, you are not the one to say, for I'll go to the captain and ask him."

"I have a letter for the chief, it's important, and I know my business and don't you go and lose the fact out of your memory."

The attendant had attempted to put on airs, but he saw he was more than matched, and he knew the chief's orders, so he said:

"I'll take in your card."

"Give me one."

The man handed him a blank card and pencil and he wrote on it,

"FRECKLES."

The attendant laughed and took it in.

"Who is he?"

"A messenger boy, sir."

"Send him in."

Freckles put on a very different air with the chief, for he saluted him, took out his letter and said:

"Important, sir, and I was to deliver it to your hands only."

The chief glanced at the seal and hastily broke it while he muttered;

"Another letter from my Unknown Ferret."

"Where did you get this boy?"

"At the Broadway office, sir."

"Who gave it to you?"

"A young man."

"Where is he?"

"Gone, sir."

"Was there no answer?"

"No, sir."

"Describe him."

"A young feller, quite flip and well toggled, sir."

"You would know him if you saw him again?"

"Yes, sir."

"He paid you for the errand?"

"Yes, sir, gave me a dollar."

"Well, if you see him again, no matter what work you are on, follow him and find out where he lives and all you can about him."

"Do this and I'll not only see that you do not lose your place, for neglecting your work, but will give you a cool fifty dollars."

"I'll do it, sir," and as the chief said there was no answer he departed, with a two-dollar note as a reminder that the officer meant what he had said.

Once alone again the chief read the letter, which was as follows:

"SIR:—

"In the old deserted graveyard, in the rear of the Haunted House, where Miser Max lived, is a vault.

"It is one hundred and fifteen feet from the wall of the mansion, and sixty from a broken cedar tree, so you cannot miss it.

"In that vault you will find a skeleton form, long dead.

"It is that of the mail-rider, Clifton Fonda, whoever he was.

"His mail-bags are with him, cut open, and his note-book, on his breast, tells the story of his death.

"There is a knife there with a name on the handle—Wilber Roswell—and as it lay by the mail-bags I took it to belong to the one who robbed the mail-rider and took him there.

"There is money in the letters, and many of them were registered.

"I can give you no further clue to the mystery, but there are many who should remember the mail-rider Fonda.

"Your

"UNKNOWN FERRET"

"Well, of all finders-out of deeds of crime, mysteries and all else, that unknown informant of mine is the champion.

"I think I recall the affair, but old Captain Sweeney will know," and the chief touched a bell.

"Send Captains Sweeney and Williams to me."

When they arrived the chief silently handed Captain Williams the letter to read, yet did not show it to Captain Sweeney, for his secret communications were kept from all except the former officer.

Captain Williams read it and said nothing.

Then the chief told Captain Sweeney that a discovery had been made and asked him if he knew Clifton Fonda, a mail-carrier.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAUGHT IN THE TRAP.

CAPTAIN SWEENEY was an old-time officer, and had been forty years in the Secret Service.

"Do I remember Clifton Fonda, sir?"

"Indeed I do; he was a United States Mail Rider many years ago, and carried the mails in his wagon up to several villages above the city.

"He used to carry money, too, to pay off the hands at several factories, it being sent to them in registered letters."

"Well, what else?"

"One night he had a valuable mail along and the temptation was too much for him, so he left his wagon in the river road, took the mail-bags and must have gone off by boat, for he was never heard of again."

"I see."

"But do you remember a man by the name of Roswell about that time?"

"Roswell? Well, yes, there was a wild young fellow by the name of Wilber Roswell, who lived on the river road with his mother.

"He shot himself, by accident it was thought, or somebody shot him, for he was found dead at the doctor's door one morning, where he had gone doubtless to have him care for his wound."

"And his mother?"

"Died long ago."

"Well, Sweeney, you and Williams come with me for a drive," and a carriage being ordered the three officers entered it and drove up to the old cemetery.

The chief was the guide and led the way, after a short search, to the old vault.

It was opened and then came the discovery just as the "Unknown's" letter had stated.

The letters were gathered up, placed in a bag, the knife, gun and all, and the body left there to be removed later.

Then the story came out, of how the mail rider's name was cleared of dishonor, and that of Wilber Roswell smirched with the crime, and which he had died before he could reap the benefit of, or confess it to any one.

How the chief learned of the old-time mystery the public did not know, for his terms with his Unknown Ferret was that nothing should be said of how he got his information.

That night New York Nat met Freckles, and learned just how the chief had received his communication, and from a peep-hole in the roof of the old mansion he had seen the three officers visit the graveyard.

He had also heard from Chub that an arrangement had been made for that night to kidnap the lawyer who had defrauded the two girls, and he and Blow were to sail the yacht up, the owner having been unable to go at the last minute.

Right off the shore the yacht then lay, and out to it, when he got the signal, went Nat, accompanied by Freckles.

"We has got him, cap'n," said Chub with an air of triumph.

"Good!" and putting on a black domino and mask Nat entered the cabin, where a man of forty, with a shrewd, avaricious face, was both bound and gagged.

The others came in too, also masked, and Nat said:

"See here, Lawyer Sands Olsen, you are in danger of your life for a crime you have committed."

The man shook his head.

"I know that you were called to the bedside of a dying widow, and she left in your hands a small fortune in jewels, asking you to dispose of them and give the money into keeping for her children.

"You said nothing to them of these jewels, for they were not aware of how much their mother had left, and you robbed them, taking the proceeds of those jewels for your own use."

"I know that you sold a lot to three different dealers in Maiden lane, you sold others out of the city, and you have now a house paid for and furnished, and four separate bank accounts, amounting to quite

a sum, when before you had next to nothing.

"Now you have got to sign a paper giving up that property to those poor girls, or we will load you with irons and sink you in to the river."

"Which will you decide upon, to give up your booty or die?"

The gag was taken from the man's mouth, and with face livid and scared he gasped out:

"I'll give it all up."

"Sign this paper which I have written here, and to-morrow at your office a gentleman will call to see that the deeds of transfer are all properly made."

"I had some money."

"That may be; but you can keep out a thousand, which is more than you doubtless had."

"Now I think of it, I'll leave you here and the gentleman will call for you and go with you to his office."

"Now sign the papers, and no nonsense."

His hands were freed and he obeyed, signing several that were placed before him, after having been read to him, and which were statements that he wished to transfer property he held in trust to the real heirs, said property consisting of a house and lot, with furniture, and certain bank accounts ranging from fifteen hundred to seven thousand dollars.

"You get off easy, sir, for you ought to go to prison for your crime," said New York Nat severely, and removing the gag from the man's mouth he left him in the yacht's cabin, ironed hands and feet.

"You will be called on at the proper time in the morning," said Nat, and the Boy Police entered their boat and quietly pulled ashore, leaving the yacht at anchor with its prisoner in the cabin.

"Freckles, come with me by the old house, and first thing in the morning go down with the letter I will give you and leave it at the chief's quarters, before he arrives."

"I will send these papers in it, and leave the chief to look after that thieving lawyer."

CHAPTER XXV.

STILL UNKNOWN.

FRECKLES carried out his order to the letter.

He went early, for he wanted to get away without being seen by the chief, as he had no desire to be asked questions as to why he did not follow the one who gave him the letter.

He was smart enough too to change his cap for one of another company of messenger boys, so he would not be suspected.

He put a different expression on his face too, when he recognized the attendant as being the same he had seen before, talked slowly and really did not look like the same youth.

He handed in the letter with the remark that charges were paid and there was no answer, but that the chief must get it as soon as he came and it was most important.

It was first the thing the chief saw and he hastily opened it before taking off his hat and coat.

He called for Captain Williams at once and handed it to him to read, while he tried to find out who brought it, but could only learn that it was a messenger-boy, and it was delivered early.

Then the two officers drove down to the dock, the police boat was boarded and it steamed up the river to where the yacht lay at anchor.

The chief and Captain Williams alone went on board and in the cabin the lawyer was found, scared terribly.

"Well, sir, you have been playing a dangerous game for one of your profession, but as those who detected you gave a pledge not to prosecute, on condition you filled certain duties, I can do no more."

"But you must go with me and fill to the letter your pledge signed here."

"I will, sir, I will, only do not ruin me by exposure."

"You deserve to be published, but you are spared from disgrace, only remember that there will be an eye upon you in the future."

"Are you ready to go and settle this business as you are pledged to do here?"

"Yes, I am."

"Who was it that captured you?"

"I do not know."

"How was it?"

"I often sail up with a friend to this point, and last night he could not go, but I did."

"His old sailing-master had gone, it seems, and two young men were in charge of the yacht."

"Reaching this far they said the yacht was leaking, the anchor was let fall and we all came below, when a revolver was thrust into my face and irons were put upon my hands, then upon my feet."

"Next I was gagged and left here until late at night, when four masked men came, all wearing black cloaks, they looked, and I was forced to sign those papers."

"You were most cleverly trapped; but you shall be set free now, and go with me to carry out your pledge, while I will thoroughly investigate the kidnapping business."

With this the lawyer was set free and two hours after he sat alone in his office, having signed away all that he had robbed the two young girls of, and made known that their father had been a large dealer in gems, and in dying had left his stock to their mother."

A wiser man the lawyer was meditating over the truth of the saying that after all "Honesty is the best policy."

Having done his duty to the girls, placing them under proper guardianship and their little fortune, too, the chief returned to his office and for a long time talked with Captain Williams.

They were more and more mystified at the strange information they were continually receiving from an unknown source.

In spite of all their skill as Secret Service officers they could not ferret out the mystery of who it was that constantly aided them in detecting crime, preventing lawless deeds, and in running crooks to earth.

"If I do not find out who this Unknown Ferret is, Williams, it will haunt me to my dying day, yes, I will never die in peace," said the chief, earnestly.

"It will all come out some day, sir, never fear; but now the one who does it is not willing to tell, for he may be some criminal himself seeking for pardon for his good deeds rendered."

"True, but one, no not a dozen persons could do such clever detective work—it is a band of ferrets," said the chief, firmly, and with this the two were left to still plot to solve the mystery of the Unknown.

CHAPTER XXVI.

QUEEN'S DISCOVERY.

"NAT, I've got news for you," announced Queen, coming alone by night to the old mansion, just as Nat and two of the band had returned from having placed Sykes the prisoner on board the clipper ship.

"All right, Queen; but what a terrible day it has been and I am 'most frozen."

"Did you ever see such a snow, and what fine sleighing there will be."

"Come to my home with me, Nat, and

we can talk it over there, and you can get warm; but did you get Sykes aboard in safety?"

"Oh yes, the letter to the captain I wrote worked like a charm, and he said he would be glad to take the boy and oblige his old friend."

"We had to take him down in the boat, in spite of the storm; but the ship lay at anchor off West Tenth street, and got out all right."

"How did he seem?"

"He was pleased with the way the captain welcomed him, and we left him, for they were getting up anchor to run out to sea in spite of the storm, and we saw her go, and if the telegraph reports in the morning say she has passed Sandy Hook we are all O. K."

"I don't believe he would betray us again, but let me tell you of my discovery."

"All right, while I get warm," and Nat, having entered the little cottage, drew close up to the stove.

"I went out to the barn this afternoon after wood, and there I saw three tramps."

"They did not see me and were talking earnestly together and I listened."

"I heard one say that he knew that there was a man coming in on the midnight train to-morrow night, with a large amount of money, for he had been on a collecting tour."

"His pal had been shadowing the man, and said he would be on the Express on the New Haven road, coming in, or due at midnight."

"To-morrow night?"

"Yes."

"Then these men plotted to wreck the train at a point, some five miles from the city, which one of them knew well, and where there was a lot of old ties, which they could heap up on the track."

"One of the men knows the man who is coming with the money, and they are to lie in wait, and when the train is wrecked, rob him, whether he is killed or not."

"The pal is to wire to-morrow just which car he will be in, and the whole affair is well planned."

"And then?"

"They left the barn soon after and I was able to breathe, for had they seen me they would have killed me."

"Indeed they would; but would you know them if you saw them again?"

"I would, and besides, as they went out, when the storm ceased, I got a good look at their faces, and they are a hard lot."

"They must be, to plot to take life by the wholesale in a railroad wreck to get money."

"Well, I've told you, Nat, so what is to be done?"

"To warn the officials of the road will lose the men, for they can escape."

"Let us drive out in a sleigh to-morrow night, get near the spot with a bright globe lantern, warn the train in time, and while you bring the team back to the city I can follow those men, tracking them to their den, and then we can send the police after them."

"You always know what to do, Nat, but let me make a suggestion?"

"Yes."

"Let the band make a haul."

"How so?"

"Get the Boy Police into hiding, to surround those fellows, close in upon them and capture the three."

"The very thing, and if we do have to kill two or three they deserve it for their cowardly plot."

"They do, indeed; but suppose you ride over the scene in the morning, and take in the situation, so you will know just where to place the boys."

"A grand idea, and I'll do it."

"I'll send two of the boys to call the others together at dark, and they can drive out in a big sleigh and take position after those men are in ambush."

"Then you and I can go in a cutter and we'll be on hand when we hear the train coming."

And so the plot was arranged.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DANGER SIGNAL.

NAT had two of his boys going the rounds early the next morning, calling them to a special meeting, and then he went with Blow out over the field where the three men had arranged to wreck the train.

It was the very spot for such a deed, a lonely place with no house near.

The pile of ties were seen, and the place picked out where the three men would doubtless lie in ambush to await the wreck.

Then Nat selected the spot for Blow to place the boys, and so they could hem the villains in from escape.

There was a crossing near the ties, and a curve beyond, and the train would have time to draw up when signaled, even if at a great speed.

Having taken the whole situation in, Nat and Blow drove back to the city and a large sleigh was hired for the night from a stable in the upper part of the city.

A cutter and swift horse were also engaged, and then Nat went to tell Queen to be ready soon after dark.

A heavy fall of snow lay on the ground, and the sleighing was fine, so they would enjoy the ride as well as render good service.

Guard was to be taken along too, and at the appointed time the party of young ferrets, all arrived, got into the big sleigh and started upon their mission, Doc acting as driver.

They crossed the track, saw that the piles had been moved and knew that their game was abroad, and at their evil work.

Going to a place where they could leave the sleigh, they got out and slowly crept toward a position.

It was not long after they had camped in the snow, all warmly muffled up, when a cutter came slowly along the road and halted.

Thus half an hour passed away and far off was heard the whistle of a train.

The train was coming to life or death.

Nearer blew the whistle, the roar of the wheels resounded, and in the distance there was a glare of light, then the flash of the headlight, and like a huge ball of fire it came flying along.

Then the cutter moved, the horse dashed forward, was reined to a sudden halt, and out from beneath a heavy buffalo-robe, New York Nat seized another globe of fire, stood upon the seat and waved it.

Instantly resounded the wild whistle to "down brakes," and the heavy train quivered and swayed as it was brought to a sudden stop.

And none too soon, for there in the track lay the ties that would have hurled it to destruction, the ends caught in a culvert and arranged so that there could be no mistake.

Running down the track, with his lamp, New York Nat met the engineer and said quickly:

"Throw off the ties quick and push on, for the work of devilry was discovered, and officers are in hiding to arrest the villains when the train goes on."

The train hands quickly threw the obstruction out of way and as the train moved on, New York Nat ran back to his cutter.

But he had seen the dark forms crouching in the thicket.

A quick signal of his lantern, and then it was thrust from sight beneath the buffalo-robe, and the gallant Boy Police closed in upon the three trembling, half-frozen scoundrels.

They fired at the boys, a few shots answered, one fell and the others surrendered and were quickly put in irons, and the start was made for the city again.

An hour after, a boy told a policeman that there was some trouble up the road with a sleighing party.

The officers hastened there, called for help, and found a large sleigh standing in front of a stable door, and in it were two men in irons and a dead man.

The next morning the chief found awaiting him another letter, and it was a story of the attempted wreck of the train, and from his Unknown Ferret.

The chief was again mystified, and tried in vain to trace who it was that so constantly and cleverly wrote him those valuable communications, for he could find no clue to his unknown allies, the Boy Police of the Secret League.

THE END.

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